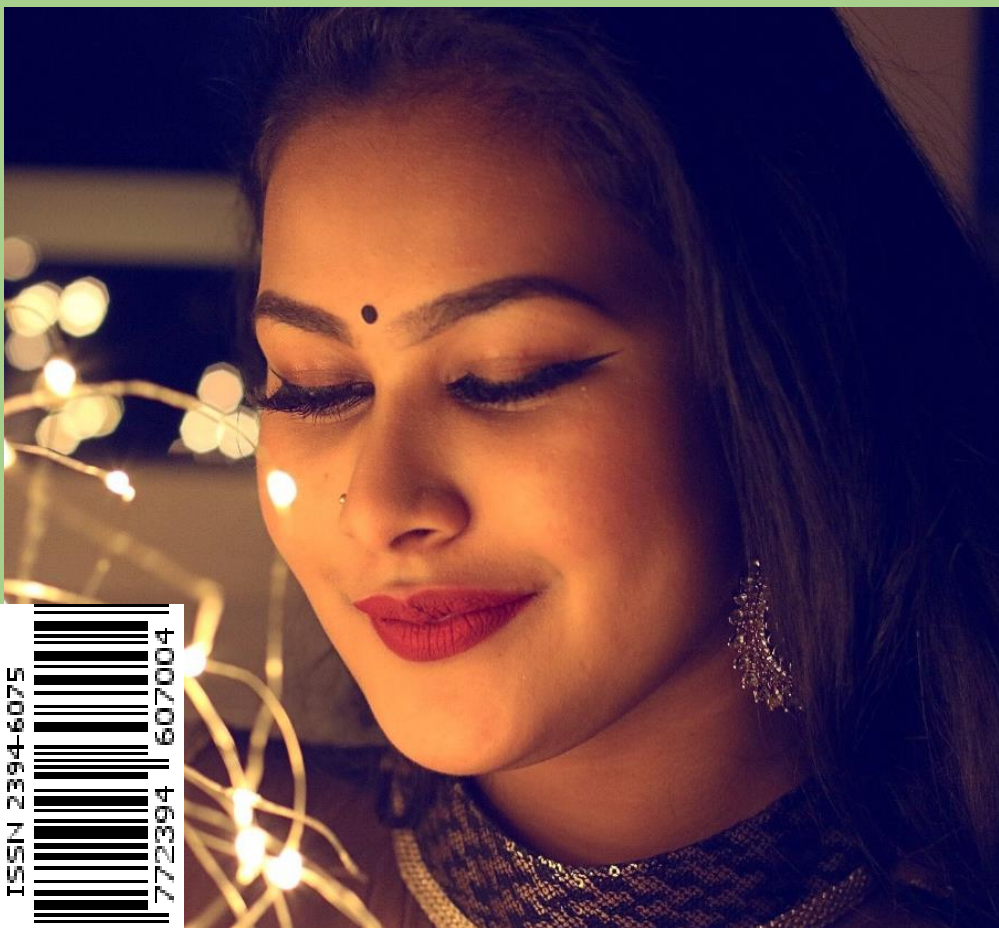


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Contemporary Literary Review India

CLRI February 2019: Vol 6, No 1

Contemporary Literary Review India

—Brings articulate writing for articulate readers.

eISSN 2394-6075

CLRI Quarterly Online Edition
Vol 6, No 1. CLRI February 2019

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Contemporary Literary Review India
605, Classic Exotica, Survey No 51/H1/1A,
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Pune - 411 048, Maharashtra (India).
Website: <http://literaryjournal.in/index.php/clri>
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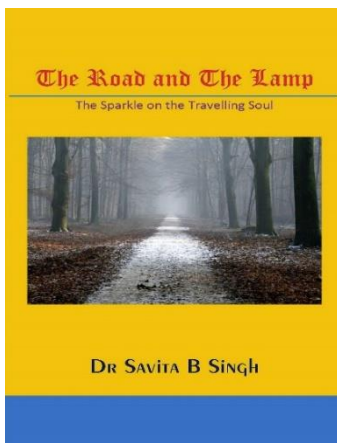


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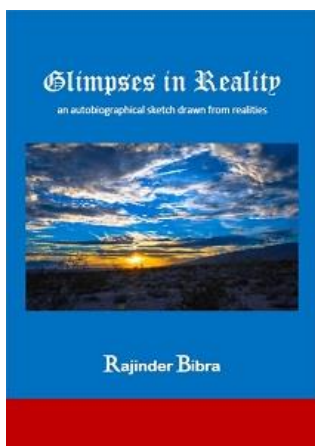
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Dr. G. Nirmala Siva

Social Struggle of the Protagonists of Bharathi Mukherjee in her stories, “The Middleman and Other Stories”

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Abstract

In the modern short stories, social problems play an important role in the lives of the protagonists as the stories are character dominant. In the character dominant stories, the conflict is usually seen between the individual and society. The protagonist's existence in the society depends upon his status in the society whether it is in India or abroad. Sometimes the protagonists are prone to struggle hard to prove themselves to fit into the society. The protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee struggle to establish their identity and fit well into America and American society. Married to a Canadian writer Clark Blaise, almost all of her short stories depict her dilemma between the two cultures, the East and West. This conflict forms the main theme of most of her short stories. After completing her studies in America she went to Canada along with her husband where she had faced acute racial prejudice. It is explicit in her second volume of short stories “The Middleman and Other Stories”.

Keywords: Bharati Mukherjee, Social Problems, Protagonist's struggle for existence, America and Canada.

Introduction

The volume of short stories, *The Middleman* and other stories, received much attention by the critics. The racial intolerance she experienced in Canada compelled her to move back to the United States. This second volume depicts the stories of America. She wrote them as a true citizen of America. In an interview with Sybil Steinberg of *Publishers Weekly* she describes her feelings about America:

Mine is a clear-eyed but definite love of America. I'm aware of the brutalities, the violence here, but in the long run my characters are survivors..... I feel there are people born to be Americans. By American I mean an intensity of spirit and a quality of desire. I feel American in a very fundamental way, whether Americans see me that way or not.¹

In most of the stories Mukherjee uses the American narrative modes in order to transport the Asian immigrants and make them transformative. In her stories she brings deep understanding of and sympathy for the plight of her characters, who find themselves caught between their new countries and the ones they have left behind. They have all brought with them false ideas about what to expect from Canada and America. Though the characters in all her stories are aware of the brutalities and violence that surround them and are often victimized by various forms of social oppression, she generally draws them as superiors. As Gabriel Sharmani says,

Mukherjee's characters share the experience of Diaspora as they explore new ways of belonging and 'becoming' in America, they are America's new 'middlemen' who have to negotiate between two modes of knowledge and remake

*home out of the hurly-burly of the unsettled magma
between two worlds. 2*

The protagonists of *The Middleman and Other stories* are trapped and struggled in American society. The Protagonists struggle to mix up and assimilate with the American culture. In doing so some are even humiliated. In the opening story “The Middleman” she describes the underworld activities in America. The narrator Alfie Judah is a middleman in the world of smugglers. Clovis.T.Ransome is a notorious gangster- adventurer under whom the drug what not. He is a sceptical person a hustler just like many immigrants. The narrator and other immigrants fail to find suitable jobs and become middlemen, because their background and past history of the countries from which they have come do not allow them to modify their ways except in rare occasions, as Judah says,

I've seen worse. I've seen Baghdad, Bombay, Queens – and now this moldering spread deep in Mayan country. Aztecs, Toltec's, mestizos, even some bashful whites with German accents. All that, and a lot of Texans. I'll learn the ropes. Forget the extradition order; I'm not a sinful man. I've listened to bad advice. I've placed my faith in dubious associates. My first American wife said, in the dog-eat-dog, Alfred, you're a beagle. My name is Alfie Judah, of the once-illustrious Smyrna, Aleppo, Baghdad – and now Flushing. Queens- Judahs. 3

Though, the story starts with the details of the narrator, the remaining of the story deals with beautiful Maria, wife of Ransom T Cloves the adventurer, who has captured her from the Minister, Mr. Gutierrez. Mukherjee, who keenly observes the American society, describes in detail the activities of the underworld smuggling in America in this story.

Mukherjee describes how the Asian men and women enthusiastically embrace the new world which, among other things, represents security, the possibility of self-realization and liberation from the restraints of the traditional societies in which they were remained in her other stories. As Thomas J. Carabas comments,

*At the same time these immigrants are usually too sophisticated to uncritically embrace every aspect of American life. Mukherjee's protagonists are mostly well-educated women, who come to America with a cosmopolitan background and a firsthand knowledge of the upheavals and suffering which afflict most of the earth's inhabitants. This awareness prevents them from being readily absorbed into the mainstream of American life. While a part of them enthusiastically adopt the best their new world has to offer, another sits warily on the sidelines as an independent spectator.*⁴

This is true in the case of the protagonists in the stories,” A Wife’s story,” Jasmine”, “Tenant”, “Fighting for the Rebound”, “Buried Lives”, and “ Danny’s Girls” In “A Wife’s Story” Mukherjee presents the interaction of Asian culture with the American culture and the liberation the American culture provides to the protagonists. Mrs. Panna Bhatt adapts very well to the social and cultural milieu of America. She feels free. She says, “I’ve made it. I’m making something of my life. I have left home, my husband, to get a Ph.D. in specialized, I have a multiple-entry visa and a small scholarship for two years.”⁵

In a delightful way she presents the difference between her grandmother and her improved status in U.S.As she says, “My mother was beaten by her mother-in-law, my grandmother, when she’d registered for French lessons at the Alliance Francaise. My grandmother, the eldest daughter of a rich zamindar, was illiterate”.⁶ Being literate

and well educated, her position sounds far better than those of her mother and grandmother. That part of a woman acting like a traditional wife is lost to her now, as she admits, "That part of my life is over, the way trucks have replaced Lorries in my vocabulary, the way Charity Chin and her lurid love life have replaced inherited notions of marital duty."⁷

While enjoying the free life of America on the one hand she also feels quite dreary, lonely, and confused on the other expresses her anger against the tyrannical ways of America, as she says,

*I don't hate Mamet. It's the tyranny of the American dream that scares me. First, you don't exist. Then you're invisible. Then you're funny. Then you're disgusting. Insult, my American friends will tell me, is a kind of acceptance. No instant dignity here. A play like this, back home, would cause riots. Communal, racial and antisocial. The actors wouldn't make it off stage. This play, and all these awful feelings, would be safely locked up.*⁸

She is weighed down by the burden of two cultures and struggles hard to balance her past life and new life in America. Being Americanized totally, she still, sometimes breaks out of it and feels just like a true Indian woman. She surprises herself when she hugs Imre on the street. She also realizes how many changes she has to make when she gets ready to dress in a beautiful sari and her heavy ornate wedding jewellery to meet her husband at J.K.F. Airport. Though she gets ready just like an Indian traditional woman, she is not what she is outside. The story ends with a note that the foreign culture is not a hindrance but helps the protagonist to realize herself, though it is a bad indictment to the institution of marriage. She wants to come out of that bondage of the institution of marriage.

The Americans, Mukherjee's protagonist encounter with, are primarily middleclass white people, who fit the old white Anglo-Saxon idea of Americanness as Carabas says,

*Many though not all, of these people are socially and economically established and their privileged status has hitherto isolated them not only from the changes in the world beyond their borders, but within America as well. These disturbing and often incomprehensible strangers bring to their insular lives unwanted knowledge to which they react in a manner as instinctive and predictable as to be labelled a tropism.*⁹

The racial tropism manifests itself when the Asian newcomer's presence becomes unbearable, and provokes the American to leave the scene. It is presented in the story, "Fighting for Rebound", Griff, the narrator relates his affair with one of the immigrants Miss Blanquita from Manila. Like many of the protagonists, she has a background of wealth and culture. She knows six languages, knows the American culture very well and daring enough to ridicule their ways. To Griff she is sometimes so familiar and sometimes so different. Blanquita feels comfortable with Griff and with the American ways because nowadays America is every one's dream and everyone's second country. Moreover, Blanquita understands well what the problem is as she explains, "You are all emotional cripples. All you Americans, you just worry about your own measly little relationships. You don't care how much you hurt the world."¹⁰

The protagonist in the story, "Tenant" feels rootlessness in America. She is a psychic because she suffers from self-alienation, she will not be able to find roots either in her native culture or foreign. Maya Sanyal teaches English in the Department of English at University of Northern Iowa. Most of the immigrants like Maya Sanyal have lived in

merely independent or emerging countries which are prone by civil and religious conflicts. All the immigrants who have come to America by chance or by necessity should understand the two hundred years of history of America and learn to adapt to American society. We find Maya Sanyal emerging herself into a different woman at different stages in the subtle, complex and traumatic process of being a new woman. Her American colleague, Fran, is responsible for bringing her to Iowa. Even while talking with Fran, and drinking a glass of bourgorn, which is the symbol of her, new life, she feels lonely and contemplates on her position in America.

Fran considers Maya as a bold adventurer, who has made a clear break with her past in India, but as we come to the end of the story, we know that there is no set back in the mind of Maya. When Rab Chatterjee, another Bengali professor, invites her to his home, she dresses carefully in one of her best and loveliest saris. At his house and while returning to her house she has been humiliated by Chatterjee because he knows about her marriage with an American and the divorce later. In the entire Bengali community in America, she has been considered a 'loose woman' and a divorcee and unfits to marry a respectable Indian in their community. She also is not satisfied with the American society, though she has become an American citizen. At the end, we come to know that though she owns an American citizenship she will never be able to understand the vigour, the light, and the hustle of the new world. Her psychological makeup does not allow her to get a permanent home in the new world; she is a tenant and remains a tenant forever. The social problem of Maya and protagonists like her will never be solved.

In the story "The Management of Grief", Mukherjee describes the agony and pain of the Indians in Canada,

when they lose their husbands, wives, children, and relatives in a plane crash. It is a story that emerged out of her scintillating and controversial documentary, 'The Sorrow and the Terror'. In the actual crash of Air India flight 182 on 23rd June 1995, which killed 329 passengers, most of the victims were Canadians of Indian origin. Shaila, the protagonist narrator of the story, loses her husband and two sons. Her neighbour Mrs. Kusum loses her daughter, her husband and another Dr. Raghav loses his four children and wife and the total family of his relatives. While all the Indians in that locality are brooding over the death of their kith and kin the Canadian Government sends a volunteer interpreter to settle the matter concerning the payment of dues to the government and the payment of compensation for the deceased families. The language is a problem for them. Some of the Indians do not know English. The Government representative pays the first visit to Shaila because all the Indians in the locality put forth her as a bold woman who can manage the situation grimly. So she approaches Shaila and requests her to help her in settling the Documents of the deceased people. Mukherjee even in her grief presents a situation of communal harmony among all Indians, when they gather at the hospital to find the photographs of the dead bodies that are brought to the hospital.

Judith Templeton a social worker who comes to settle the payment of compensation visits Shaila, seeking her help in speaking with the other families. Among them are the Sikh couple who have lost their two sons. They do not want to sign the necessary papers because to sign the papers was equal to sign their son's death warrant. They were illiterate people. They did not know even how to fill up the cheques to pay the necessary bills. So the water, current, and gas connections to their house are stopped. Even then, they do not want to sign the papers. On the other hand, they are so

stubborn that their sons will certainly come to save them if they lead a hopeless life. They have strong faith in their sons and on their brought up. Shaila tries to make them understand the situation, telling them that she too has lost her husband and her two sons. But the Sikhs are stubborn. Judith and Shaila feel helpless. While they are in the car Judith talks about her next destitute a woman who always cried. She calls her the 'realness'. Then Shaila gets angry against the inhuman feelings of Judith and requests her to stop the car. She gets down and slams the door leaving Judith to ask the question "Is there anything I said? Anything I did Shaila. Let us talk about it." ¹¹

This story is a good example for her ability to present her socio-political awareness. While explaining the deeply moving response to the Air India crash she also criticizes Canada's racialized society and its inadequate attempts at handling the situation.

Conclusion

Thus the social problems play an important role in the lives of the protagonists as the stories are character dominant. The protagonists of Mukherjee struggle to establish their identity and fit well in the American society. Almost all the stories in *The Middleman and Other Stories*, depict her dilemma between the two cultures of East and West, the adopted and the inherited cultures. All the immigrants who have come to America by necessity have to understand the two hundred years of history of America and learn to adapt to American society. The final story "The Management of Grief" is a pungent hit at the irresponsible behaviour of the Canadian government who does not show any concern when many Asians die in a plane crash. Instead of extending their help to survivors of the families of the deceased, the Canadian government demands the settlement

of the dies from them .Mukherjee criticises the inhuman behaviour of the Canadian government towards the Asian immigrants.

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Dr. Kamna Singh

Herzog as a Dialogic Protagonist in Saul Bellow's *Herzog*

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Abstract

Herzog (1964) is a novel by the American-Jewish author Saul Bellow. It is a modern stream-of-consciousness classic in the epistolary tradition. *Herzog* concerns the mid-life crises of an eccentric professor Moses Herzog set against the backdrop of post World War II America. The narrative of this novel is a pastiche of polyphonic voices, letters, flashbacks, quotations, contradicting points of view, motifs such as sex and symbols such as flowers, a grand clock etc., all of which are united by the protagonist's consciousness.

The concept of 'Dialogic', given by M. M. Bakhtin, refers to a work that answers, corrects, addresses the silences within, or extends a previous work. A dialogic work thus continually informs and in turn, is continually informed by previous works. All thought is dialogical in the sense that anything anyone ever thinks invariably exists in response to or in anticipation of other things. All language is dialogical too as it is the precipitation of thoughts.

This paper aims to illustrate this concept of 'Dialogic' through the consciousness of the protagonist Herzog and through the narrative structure in the novel *Herzog*. It shows how the use of this technique allows Herzog to emerge not as a madman but rather a 'Schlemiel' (a

traditional hard-luck character of Yiddish folklore who embodies the Promethean spirit) and even an 'Ilui' (Jewish term for 'genius').

Keywords: American-Jewish fiction, Bakhtin, Bellow, Dialogic, *Herzog*.

Herzog as a dialogic protagonist in Saul Bellow's *Herzog*

Myself is thus and so, and will continue thus and so. And why fight it? My balance comes from instability. (Herzog, *Herzog*, 1964.)

Herzog (1964) is a novel by the American-Jewish author Saul Bellow. It is considered a modern classic in the epistolary tradition repeatedly likened to Joyce's stream-of-consciousness classic *Ulysses* which blurs distinctions between genres, literary and nonliterary, fact and fiction. It concerns the mid-life crises of an eccentric, self-justifying, cuckolded, and humiliated professor Moses Herzog set against the backdrop of post World War II America. Precipitated into thoughtfulness by the failure of his second marriage, Herzog explains that he has been "overcome by the need to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends."

The concept of 'Dialogic', given by M. M. Bakhtin, refers to a work that answers, corrects, addresses the silences within, or extends a previous work. A dialogic work thus continually informs and in turn, is continually informed by previous works. All thought is dialogical in the sense that anything anyone ever thinks invariably exists in response to or in anticipation of other things. All language is dialogical too as it is the precipitation of thoughts. This paper aims to illustrate this concept of 'Dialogic' through the consciousness of the protagonist Herzog and through the

narrative structure in the novel *Herzog*. It shows how the use of this technique allows Herzog to emerge not as a madman but rather schlemiel (a traditional hard-luck character of Yiddish folklore embodies the Promethean spirit) and even a genius.

The narrative within this novel is a pastiche of polyphonic voices, letters, flashbacks, quotations, contradicting points of view, motifs such as sex and symbols such as flowers, a grand clock etc.- all united by the protagonist's consciousness. Herzog fails in his personal and professional life, and instinctively produces dozens of letters, some actual but mostly imaginary to God, intimates and famous strangers, the dead and the living. The level of intertextuality within the novel is mind-boggling, and rivals that of T. S. Eliot's *Wasteland*.

Herzog is considered as a man losing his sanity by many characters within the novel and he is appalled at what he calls the Protestant-Freudian assessment of himself provided by his analyst Edvig who has labeled Herzog's love for his unfaithful second wife Madelaine "hysterical dependency" and Herzog's personality type as narcissistic, masochistic, and anachronistic. In self-defense, Herzog condemns thinkers like Shapiro and Banowitch who accept psychoanalytical premises and always work on the premise that "madness always rules the world". He complains that Hobbes and Freud have not been our benefactors. Thinkers like Dewey, Nietzsche, and Whitehead are accused by Herzog of concluding that we cannot find happiness within ourselves because we distrust our own natures and take recourse in religion or philosophy. Nietzsche is indicted for unleashing the Dionysiac spirit and calling modern cultural history a fall from classical greatness.

Nietzsche's ideas are no freer from perversion, nor closer to enlightenment than those with whom he quarrels, Herzog

concludes. He blames Heidegger for the idea that we have all fallen into the “quotidian”. Spengler’s anti-semitic historicism in *The Decline of the West* infuriates him. Modern physics, with its theory of entropy also comes under attack, as do genetics, demography, sociology, statistics, and all the other disciplines which the author of this novel, Bellow believes to have contributed to the destructive idea of biological or genetic predestination of the Self through the logical application of the Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest. Herzog goes from there to a condemnation of Rousseau. “We must get it out of our heads that this is a doomed time that we are waiting for the end, and the rest of it, mere junk from fashionable magazines. Things are grim enough without these shivery games.” The clarification taking place is stylistically mirrored in the progressively linear organization of the narrative. He concludes that “the light of truth is never far away, and no human being is too negligible or corrupt to come into it.”

Herzog also does some quasi-heroic actions; like Hamlet he wants to take revenge, but when the scene is ready, he withdraws into meditation. His genius remains confined to his mind and unlike the American-Jewish author Malamud’s schlemiel character Asher Lev (who is able to channelize his trauma into creating great works of art), Herzog is unable to direct it productively into lasting works. James M. Mellard calls him “a hero of consciousness” (90) and asserts:

. . . in contrast to the popular heroes -- the cowboy, the detective, the spy, the adventurer, even the lover -- Herzog plays out his role not in the realm of action (although he does act eventually) but in the realm of consciousness.”
(Mellard, 1979: 90)

Perhaps it would be suggestive to add that Herzog is the genius of maintaining a multiple of irresolvable dialogues in the realm of consciousness. Mellard is aware of this fact, but looking at the novel from another perspective, he comes to a different conclusion. Earlier in his article he reads Herzog as a relativist:

There is a certain irresolvable equivocation in Herzog's position, for, all the while he studies the patterns and meanings of history, and he believes that any answer he arrives at shall necessarily be partial, incomplete. Consequently, his critiques of the historical philosophers really appear only in obiter dicta in the course of his many letters. He offers no systematic arguments, nor can one do here in his stead." (Mellard, 1979: 87)

Mellard argues that Herzog certainly is not a traditional historicist, but arriving at "a kind of existential historicism," Herzog is "a historian of the contemporary mode" (86). From another perspective, narrative or historical reason can be contrasted with instrumental reason, the rationality that views others as instruments in the way of one's own improvement. However, dialogic rationality, equally different from instrumental rationality, is the term that can describe the mentality of Herzog better. The historical reason of Ortega Y Gasset and the narrative reason of Mellard can describe the changes that happen to a consciousness through time, but, even if it does not fail to recognize the role of the other in the changes, it ultimately fails to see the other consciousnesses and voices as valid and a true subject for communication. Dialogic reason on the other hand, sees all the other voices and ideas as existing in the present moment of novel, constructing the novel through the process of dialogue.

The actions of Herzog are dialogic actions and he is a genius of dialogue. His doctoral thesis, *The State of Nature*

in 17th and 18th century English and French Political Philosophy (10) and his book, *Romanticism and Christianity* (10) are attempts to make a dialogue between the past and the present:

His thesis had been influential and was translated into French and German. His early book, not much noticed when it was published, was now on many reading lists, and the younger generations of historians accepted it as a model of the new sort of history, 'history that interests us' -- personal, engagée -- and looks at the past with an intense need for the contemporary relevance."(Herzog, 1964:11-12)

Mellard's analysis of Herzog's letters is a "historical" reading of the novel, yet they are suggestive for a dialogic reading. Mellard finds Rousseau "the political philosopher whose historical theory draws Herzog's greatest ire" (87). On the other hand, Mellard rightly believes that Herzog "cares perhaps even less" for the twentieth century opponents of Rousseau, the Wasteland theorists such as Piorre Joseph Proudhon, T. E. Hulme, and of course, T. S. Eliot (87-90). Nevertheless, Herzog does not totally reject the Waste Landers, or anyother ideology. His genius lies in the fact that he assimilates the strong points of each group and like an architect, builds his vision of the world using the other's most efficient building blocks of worldview. Perhaps the metaphor of architectonics could not represent the dialogicity of Herzog's consciousness, but it is a fair metaphor in showing the mind of Herzog as a hybrid construction; "he is to be found at the center of organization where all levels intersect" (*Dialogic Imagination* 49).

SandorHimmelstein, is one of those "reality instructors" that is situated diametrically in an opposed point to Herzog. He is the embodiment of the Wasteland outlook among the

characters of the novel. He believes, "Facts *are* nasty" (*Herzog* 92). Herzog describes him as a "fierce dwarf with protruding teeth and deep lines in his face" (92), Herzog is momentarily angry with himself for asking help from this hunchback lawyer. At the same time, he imagines Himmelstein as a man who could "be attractive, too, generous, convivial, even witty" (92). This is nothing but the ability to juxtapose contrapuntally the character traits of one person (Bakhtin, 1984:40), to make a dialogue between the different layers of one specific consciousness. Here the reader is not confronted with a subjective psychologism like the works of Joyce or Proust (Bakhtin, 1984:37), but with an intersubjective and dialogic psychologism. Herzog is not an isolated consciousness, but a mind in relation to others, a related and, of course, "*relating animal*" who is sometimes "*sentenced*" to relationships (*Herzog* 268). What distinguishes him from many other characters of the genre is his unique awareness of this fact. "I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human," he says to Asphalter, his friend who endangered his life to save a monkey. "When preachers of dread tell you that others only distract you from metaphysical freedom then you must turn away from them" (*Herzog*, 280).

And Herzog is a genius of dialogue because he maintains a dialogue even with the preachers of dread, as well as with all the other monologic constituents of the Western culture.

The consciousness of Herzog is located at the point of contact between many worldviews that are sometimes contradictory. This, as showed, makes Herzog a dialogic genius. But what are the dialogues that he maintains? The very first sentence of Herzog shows how much the other's ideas are active in his mind: "If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me, thought Moses Herzog" (*Herzog*, 7). The discourse of the others is present in the 'if' clause of the

conditional sentence in its living and active totality. This idea, that he is out of his mind, is the subject of Herzog's mental dialogue. Without repressing the discourse of the others about himself, he fully articulates them and then juxtaposes his own discourse as a contrapuntal point: "it's all right with me." Even this first sentence of the novel is a free location for a contact between two ideas. Interestingly, the next utterance of the novel shows that the different ideas belong to different consciousnesses: "Some people thought he was cracked and for some time he himself had doubted that he was all there. But now, though he still behaved oddly, he felt confident, clairvoyant and strong" (*Herzog*, 7). The idea of the others about Herzog and his temporal assimilation of that idea do not negate the necessity of dialogue. He only affirms the thought of the others about himself. His identity, so to speak, is formed through his relationship with the other people; and as the rest of the text shows, he is dependent upon the others for his realization of the self.

What is more important is that Herzog's dialogicality lets the other people enter his territory. This acceptance of the others (or dialogic rejection of them) is something that is with him from the very beginning. He feels "confident, clairvoyant and strong" (*Herzog*, 7) because he is able to maintain a dialogue with the others, those who are at times opposed to him and the cause of his "sufferings." Such a dialogue is also maintained between different layers of his consciousness, which is formed as a result of his contact and communication with the other people of the city, and is as multiple and plural as the world around himself. The dialogues of Herzog with others are not just about his personal affairs. At the same time they are concerned with larger cultural and intellectual issues; it is the obsessed and relating mind of Herzog that finds a close relationship between the two. Bellow's adoption of the epistolary

tradition is indeed a stroke of genius; it is also a genuine technique for addressing the ideas that are not instantly present on the contemporary intellectual scene. He makes a dialogue between the Romanticism of Rousseau and the Wasteland outlook of the twentieth century, juxtaposing their ideas with each other. One of the other best examples that can be provided here is the old opposition between Nietzsche (and his followers) and Christianity. This opposition has been the cause of many intellectual tensions of the twentieth century. What is important is that these ideas and this kind of treatment of ideas are present in the novel. The text of the novel is not simply plural; it is a dynamic plurality. The ideas are not just there in an inert, neutral, and passive way, they are in conflict with each other. The conflict of ideas in the novel is strategic. Carnivalization of ideas was a strategy for maintaining a free dialogue between the ideas and Herzog's ability to do this despite; or rather because of his personal crises is a sure indication of his genius.

As the narrative moves towards conclusion, the reader gains a fairly lucid understanding of the factors that have shaped Herzog's identity which in turn, has determined his reactions to the world around him. As the reader pieces together, like a puzzle, Herzog's consciousness and his story, he/ she comes to realize that many of these factors are shared by others such as the reader himself. It causes the reader to question his/ her understanding of the world around him/ her and his/ her responses to it.

As the reader thus gains empathy for Herzog as a well-educated man puzzled and confounded by the events that swept away the life he had so painstakingly pieced together for himself; Herzog begins to emerge as a schlemiel, a traditional hard-luck character of Yiddish folklore "who is repeatedly knocked down by fortune, but who always

struggles to his feet to try his luck again, hoping for the best... constantly aware of the absurdity of his situation..." (Hershino). He seems to embody the Promethean or Faustian spirit of the postmodern individual who struggles to establish and assert his identity even as he stands pitted against great odds. Through his conversations with himself, he seems to have had a profound education in the realities of life through death, and rediscovered the value of the healing power of nature on his Ludeyville estate. At the end, irrespective of what the other characters think of him, Herzog seems to have regained his sense of Jewish identity, purged himself of violent anger, and repented of his dandyism and promiscuity.

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A Study of the Transvestite(s) Demasculinized in Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "The Princess"

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Abstract

This paper is divided into two sections. The first section touches upon the transformation of the male protagonists into women via cross-dressing – its implied meaning and meaninglessness, the discourse of transcendence taking flight from masculinity and its overall connotations. The second section argues why such an action of re-masculinizing serves nothing more than achieve an ultimate obscure deferral of the de-masculinized male, taking the female under its wings in the process.

Keywords: Transvestism, Masculinity, Effeminacy, De-Masculinity, the Feminine.

I

The *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* defines the word 'Transvestism' as "the practice of wearing clothing appropriate to the opposite sex, often as a manifestation of sexuality" (1397). Three things should not escape the readers' eye before inferring its meaning in Tennyson's poem. First, the act of "practice" induces an act of habit which also engages in the act of repetition. Essentially, the word practice *creates* in the habituated a sense of pleasure somewhere, which proceeds by being voluntary at first, and transforms itself into an involuntary

pleasure upon deliberations. I do not suggest that practice cannot be discontinued, or that it might not yield displeasure. On the contrary, I strive to demonstrate why the act of “practice” is cyclical in general and in particular. Secondly, Transvestism, which is often limited to the man dressing himself in a woman’s attire, gains an equivocal benefit from the meaning provided by the lexicon—something that I shall work upon in detail with *The Princess* in perspective. Lastly and most importantly, I emphasize not on the “sexuality” of any of the characters in this long verse poem; instead, penetrative focus on the various meanings (or lack of it) of the word “manifest” (from its original Latin *Manifestus*, meaning clarity) reveals how this thoroughly ambiguous word defines the larger ideologies and its illusive presence all throughout the verse novel.

My manner of dealing with the question of manifestation is different than the usual deciphering of its meaning. The question “What does the poem manifest?” is substituted in this critique by “What is manifested when the poem no longer exists?”. As the question demands, I shall not expatiate upon what the transvestites signify in this poem; my answer shall focus upon what it is to suffer from the loss or gain of gender (specifically, male sexuality) which, as I opine, is more philosophical than specific to the poem. In the Prologue to *The Princess*, Tennyson begins with a Romantic limning which has similar implications:

*Take Lilia, then, for heroine, 'clamor'd he,
'And make her some great princess, six feet high,
Grand, epic, homicidal; and be you
The prince to win her. (135, ll. 217-220, italics mine)*

The internal rhyme in the first two lines signify the act of procuring and creating in succession. On a larger canvas, it might identify with the fact that there is no natural “heroine” but one to be procured and created suitably. The question naturally goes backwards further- assuming that a heroine is a construct, is Lilia a woman that can be “taken” for granted, or simply improvised upon what characterizes as “womanly” in her? This is not speculation, for Tennyson ends the line with the masculine “he”, which means the “womanly” is always alongside the “manly”, and the “heroine” taken is a “hero” taken too.

As I began by saying, the question of manifestation is not what belongs to the poem. It is more worthwhile to dwell upon what man-infestation is in scenarios where there are no men in the making but women, theoretically. When H.W. Longfellow comments on “a discordant note somewhere” (164) in this poem, I think we have identified the discordance. The discordance is furthered by the dismissive use of “some” in the next line, and that too beside the culturally significant word “great”. Either the culture of greatness is sham, or a princess being great too often, no longer is. If that “some great princess” were “grand, epic, homicidal”, then she is a by-product at once of fiction, of stereotype and of public fancy created beyond the individual. Is not the princess gender-neutral then, as the poem seems to suggest?

It is not so—at least not in the manner in which I want Transvestism to be understood as the critique progresses. By using the term “gender-neutral”, I do not imply the absence of gender, but the even and proportionate presence of both genders in such a way that one disqualifies the other. It helps explain Tennyson’s frequent use of “half” all

throughout the poem, as Eileen Tess Johnston rightly points out.¹ The fourth line of the section quoted creates not so much a prince, but a victor. Naturally, the other “half” is the relinquished half, and so are its adjectives disqualified and re-appropriated, although we cannot completely be sure of this. This, for Johnston, qualifies the poem for a “medley” where although we know that the prince wins the princess or the hero lurks without the heroine, we can never know self-assuredly what each gender fighting the war qualifies as in terms of an individual: “self-sufficiency- be it biological, imaginative or spiritual- is an imperfect ideal; interdependence is the condition of life, and its recognition is life-giving” (561). The woman as princess or the man as prince is anything but a gendered being.

In Part I of *The Princess*, the readers come across the first “thought” acted upon by the prince and his friends in order to win Princess Ida primarily:

*A thought flash'd thro' me which I clothed in act,
Remembering how we three presented Maid
We sent mine host to purchase female gear;
He brought it, and himself, a sight to shake
The midriff of despair with laughter, (139-40, ll.193- 99)*

The actions are stifling. First, the prince “clothed” his act of thought, implying that the objective of action involves nothing that challenges the codes of accepted etiquette. Secondly, his action is not the performance but the repetition of a performed action, hinting at his awareness of the consequences that *could* follow as a result. The third is

¹ pp. 559-60 of Johnston’s essay are citeworthy. The entire reference is in the *Works Cited* section.

an open-ended act- why would they laugh at the “sight”, and what are they laughing at exactly—the individual, the memory of the action or the action itself of dressing once again in a woman’s raiment? Paul Turner’s observation is pertinent in this situation: “The Prince plays only a supporting role, and the admirable side of her (Ida’s) character is deliberately high-lighted by exaggerating the feebleness of his” (105). This, in the context of the poem, would suggest that they are laughing at themselves—their own feebleness, but it answers half the question. It also explains why despair and laughter coincide, and why it is the mid-riff that shakes. What I think as an alternative concern is the lack of significance that they attach with the opposite gender, and consequently with themselves. If “female gear” procured would familiarize them with the feminine, then surely, they were never masculine enough to shake off their unmanifested maleness either. This originates at the beginning of Part II of the poem where Ida is introduced in a Shakespearean manner:

*There at a board by tome and paper sat,
With two tame leopards' couch'd beside her throne,
All beauty compassed in a female form,
The Princess; liker to the inhabitant
Of some clear planet close upon the sun
Than our man's earth; (141, ll. 18-23)*

I could jokingly suggest that the Princess is Venusian. From a cursory reading, the conclusion would hint at the fact that the stereotypical gender roles are reversed. Much as it might delight some admirers of the poem, it is far from it. To begin with, “her throne”, as the poet suggests—its decorative and overall adjectival value, likens the “beauty” more with power. The “two tame leopards” are symbolic of

power tamed in order to represent beauty, but the throne is masculine to the utmost degree, and if she were to use the tamed power to heighten her own sovereignty, it should make her more powerful, not more beautiful as the verse lines fool us into conjecturing. What we have now is a masculine female on a male throne resembling a man, a “liker”. This is interesting because contrary to the poem’s prologue, we have, critically speaking, a quest where a man is not attempting to court a woman, but a transvestite determined to win over a man or a manly woman, and in the process of becoming a higher man, allow the subjugated manly woman to *create* femininity in her.² This disturbs Donald E. Hall who, as I believe, can prophesy the covert future of such an expression: “Tennyson answers that men will continue to speak for women and can even be relied upon to bring about changes that will benefit both sexes” (56). Here at least, one can evince nothing of this kind unless the poem is read this way; either the man administers, or the manly—sometimes the female, but never the feminine.

What I propose as my theoretical position has equivocal standards, though I believe the general remarks are neat. The ambiguity arises in wrongfully assuming the prince’s seizures as a medical condition understood so by most critics. Cyril, in a conversation with Florian confesses to a condition not easily apprehensible:

do I chase

The substance or the shadow? Will it hold?

² Terry Eagleton’s analysis is splendid on this occasion: “The bare bones of its narrative, after all, concern a ‘feminine’ male assuming female disguise in order to woo a ‘masculine’ female to whom he plays the roles of both child and lover.” (77). Citations at the end of the essay.

*I have no sorcerer's malison in me,
No ghostly hauntings like his Highness. I
Flatter myself that always everywhere
I know the substance when I see it. (150, ll. 386-91)*

The two questions asked by Cyril challenge the validity of at least two planes of consciousness. The first question is a philosophical pursuit of the mental condition, but the second is a pursuit of the material and its mental manifestation. What is interesting is, in midst the serious pursuit of both questions, the resultant middle path for Cyril is humour that embodies irony, sarcasm and a certain darkness that I cannot concretely define. This is of prime interest because Cyril's reference to the Prince's seizures is not medical, but touches upon elements of materialism and immaterialism, magic, the paranormal and the perceptive. The syncretism of all these, I argue, is how a seizure can be more imaginatively defined in the course of this poem. Barbara Herb Wright oversimplifies this when she believes that during a seizure, "he remains a participant in, and an observer of, the split between objective and subjective realities" (68). It does not explain why an observer "seizes" the split or why he transcends the seizure. The Prince's seizure is not so much an illness as it the transcendence from one state to another, and its heaviest consequences are in the department of gender creation. Florian's love for Lady Blanche could be one such instance where contrary to the other 'created' genders in the poem, the feminine gender is made available to him:

*An open-hearted maiden, true and pure.
If I could love, why this were she. How pretty
Her blushing was, and how she blush'd again,
As if to close with Cyril's random wish!*

Not like your Princess cramm'd with erring pride

*Nor like poor Psyche whom she drags in tow. (Part III, ll.
81-86, my emphasis)*

The phrasing is downright of value since it begins in the present, identifying the virginal model of the woman and its larger moral implications to begin with. Almost immediately, it suspends itself to the faculty of possession—a prime example of the Transvestite coming to terms with the demands of the opposite sex. The transcendental values that Transvestism had allowed him now determines the sexual reality it best chooses to adopt and adapt with. The present paves way for the future, and it treasures the past which he wants as an act of repetition. The sense of possession gives him the impulse for a conjugal relationship which “becomes a literal growth towards a oneness which does not obliterate difference” (60), as James R. Kincaid rightly points out. It must be brought to light that this is the easiest of such Transvestal realizations since it places the woman in a buffer zone where the Princess is a man and Lady Psyche too feminine even for a female. In that way, Florian’s gender is not as much created as it is improvised into creation – one among the many one finds in this verse epic.

I shall digress here a little. What I argue in favour of both Transvestism and transcendence engages the man demasculinizing or demasculinized. It is by no means similar to what I define by Transvestism. Demasculinizing is one form of Transvestism no doubt, but Transvestism in its proper moral function is transcendental—something that either gender roles renunciated cannot be equated with. The digression this time is in favour of the feminine (or the female?) and their ratification of the moral role of the child:

O-children-there is nothing upon Earth

More miserable than she that has a son

And sees him err. (157, ll. 243-45)

I emphasize here the child because in the schema of a demasculinized transvestite trying to feminize the lady and re-masculinize, the woman is father of the offspring. The “Earth” was a metaphor introduced as fatherly in a previous section, and the pun on “son” in the second line intimates the presence of both genders symbolically. Alisa Clapp-Itnyre is right in identifying the children as “less bodies than symbols of women’s creative capacity” (240). Also interesting is the way the child’s moral failure is unconsciously attributed to his gender; it could signify that the male child is born amoral, only to explore the possibilities of redefining his gender through a transcendental experience. This is a breakthrough because the male is a mistaken gender if analyzed critically—it can un-err only upon the mother being fatherly during his moral experience till the father can prolong his masculinity post its man-infestation.

One last point requires to be made before I conclude the first section of this essay. Duly understood, *The Princess* is a poem on the necessity of education among the women, but how much does the female identify either with the feminine or with the masculine in the long run? In Part III of the poem, an anticipated opinion is finally blurted out by Ida herself:

No doubt we seem a kind of monster to you;

We are used to that; (157, ll. 259-60, my emphasis)

Gerhard Joseph, in a study not similar to what I propose, says something quite similar to the faith that the poem loosely upholds in the poem: “It is from the primordial maternal principle that the male ego must wrest an

independent notion of self even *before* coming to terms with the paternal” (10, original emphasis). I must emphasize that the “primordial maternal principle” is what Ida calls a “monster” from the perspective of the percipient. This is very problematic in case of this poem since it is not the woman who is in touch with the principle but is thought to be by the relative generalization of the other. On the other hand, to be a “kind of monster” qualifies her not so much for the maternal principle as it qualifies her for monstrosity- something that the poem creates through its queer propriety. To be used to monstrosity also stretches the argument to a limit where the woman, who is masculine, gets *used* to neither gender but to the asexual monstrosity. The larger question created from this state of eternal deferment is, can the male “wrest an independent notion” of masculinity, manliness or manhood from this monstrosity, or is the deferment of such values the compromise of the Man?

II

The fracture of womanhood is what gathers strength as the poem advances to its end. It is from a wobbling feminine masculinity that the Transvestite recovers his masculine nature from; in other words, he re-masculinizes himself. Observe how Lady Blanche frames her wrath towards Princess Ida:

*Yet I bore up in part from ancient love,
And partly that I hoped to win you back,
And partly that you were my civil head,
And chiefly you were born for something great,
In which I might your fellow worker be,
When time should serve; (Part IV, ll. 284-89)*

In each of these sentences strung together by conjunctions, the first arises from an instinct; the second and third complete each other by performing the Kantian task of desire and necessity, whereas the last harks back again to that original question of the instinctive. This is crucial, since Lady Blanche avidly critiques the philosophical stance that greatness can be acquired, which in this case disqualifies the Princess of all the accomplishments she has had, for she *might* not have been “born” for masculinity or greatness. The use of the progressive “should” in the last line does not signify an achievement, but a deferment. What time serves therefore becomes a ‘lag’ however progressive, best understood by Jeanie Watson’s use of the phrase “progressive amelioration” (72) in her essay. If amelioration involves deferment of the growing masculinity in the female, the Transvestite stands to gain from it, but in what ways? As Lady Blanche’s ire amplifies, it transforms into a gender failure:

I will not boast;

Dismiss me, and I prophesy your plan,

Divorced from my experience, will be chaff

For every gust of chance, and men will say

We did not know the real light, but chased

The wisp that flickers where no foot can tread. (IV, ll.334-39, italics mine)

As the word “divorced” clearly suggests, Lady Blanche was playing second fiddle to Ida; her femininity was what Ida had *created* and conserved her masculinity from. Blanche’s transparency educates the readers of the immaturity in the scheme of perpetuating this gender-reversal since it was sustained by a ‘feminine’ fiddle by a female. The “plan” falls apart in her monologue. This

contrives the formation of a moral vulnerability—the lack of “real light” (or the real dark) will be compensated by a new moral code: what the “men will say”. As can be seen, their judgment is philosophical; it does not hurt their actual practical scheme but affects its ideological value and morale- something that E.K. Sedgwick sums up in a more literal context: “he (the Prince) gets what he wants by losing the (physical) battle, not by winning it.” in order to “retain the privileged status ... along with the implicit empowerment of maleness” (615). The “effeminized” man has taken two steps towards male and maleness, but his capability of living the abstracted reality or dealing in a compromise is the most important question that the poem ruffles us with.

One must take a step back before posing to answer this question. Whether a man becomes a man in the concrete or abstract (here also as a cultural imposition) sense is dependent upon his re-masculinizing or his remaining demasculinized in a wholly new way. The solution to both questions can be tackled by critically answering if the act of Transvestism or the act of transcendence was successful or not. By the end of Part IV, an answer is supplied to some effect:

You have done well, and like a gentleman,

And like a prince; you have thanks for all.

And you look well too in your women's dress.

Well have you done and like a gentleman.

You saved our life; (ll. 507-10)

The Transvestite is now “like” a prince in his “women’s dress”, and his act is successful. Its success metaphorically establishes him not as the prince, but like the prince; the metaphor naturally positions itself, in a different context,

between being a man and being like a man. This ambivalence remains although we cannot deny now that the prince is being re-masculinized both physically and morally. The act of transcendence initiated by the “women’s dress” has upgraded him to his original position, but perhaps no more than realizing its peremptory deed—the deed that “saved our life”. One should read the meaning at different levels in order to construe that the prince is not a man in the more abstract attributes that one attaches to the word (manly, manliness, manhood, masculine etc.) but purely concrete and agential. This critical deduction of man, I strongly emphasize, is executed to deny the imperious and more abstract mis-formulation of the word by the Prince’s father:

Look you, Sir!

Man is the hunter; woman is the game

The sleek and shining creatures of the chase,

They love us for it, and we ride them down. (V, ll. 146-49)

Almost immediately, the newly created man from his Transvestism has a semi-defensive offence to his father’s assailable allegations:

“Yea, but Sire!” I cried,

“Wild natures need wise curbs” (164-65)

The alliteration is intelligent; Tennyson astutely brings home the argument that the wild does not need domesticity but knowledge and wisdom—something that the Transvestite had acquired through transcendence. It need not necessarily mean that in his empathy for the feminine sex he lessens the acquired manhood he demonstrates; what he does more dexterously is identifying with the female sex while differing with them and deferring from the abstract imposed definition of manhood simultaneously. This gains

clarity when Gama *wisely* eulogizes the Prince's accomplishments:

You talk almost like Ida; she can talk;

And there is something in it as you say:

*But you talk kindlier; we esteem you for it. (V, ll. 201-03,
emphasis mine)*

In Marjorie Stone's phrase, "Tennyson's position... ultimately reduces to "Vive la difference"" (112). There is no need to condescend; one understands that the difference is enforced on both sides and technically, it is the plot's position and not Tennyson's by any large measure. The estimation by Gama is an estimation of the cognizance of the difference, not strictly the difference itself.

A study of both the songs and the animal imagery in the poem has been appositely done by Jane Wright. The meaning of lines like

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,

And murmuring of innumerable bees. (VII, ll. 206-07)

Or of Ida's songs, most specifically

Now folds the lily all her sweetness up,

And slips into the bosom of the lake.

So fold thyself my dearest, thou, and slip

Into my bosom and be lost in me. (ll. 172-75)

Have been critiqued with efficiency.³ I cannot but estimate such a study where desire is in question. However, there are

³ "Ida ventriloquizes a literary representation of one kind of heterosexual man's desire; her 'sweet' voice is someone else's." (268). See "The Princess and the Bee", *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 2015, pp. 251-273.

equivocal lines where desire becomes a moral question that has relative autonomy over both genders:

Like to like!

The woman's garment hid the woman's heart. (V, ll. 294-95)

It is a moment of stereotypical revelation for the re-masculinized Transvestite. The desire of the mind, according to him, is never dissimilar to the physical desire that constitutes the gender. If it is “like to like”, it is reciprocative with nature as witness to the axiom, and we can slightly tweak Wright’s statement into the heterosexual’s “desire”, not the “heterosexual man’s”. This could be one way of justifying why the Transvestite finds both his mind and body not fundamentally, but derivatively in this process. As I have stated earlier, it does not intimate the ‘man’ with the abstract principles that float around conceptions like manhood or manliness. The realization through transcendence is far practical in approach by the time the poem achieves its natural end:

Know

The woman's cause is man's; they rise or sink

Together, dwarf'd or godlike, bond or free...

[She] shares with man

His nights, his days, moves with him to one goal. (VII, ll. 242-46)

The quote begins with two halves united by a cause; they face the tribulations both morally and theologically—informing them that no matter however distinct, in their oneness lies their synchronicity with the accepted ways. There is no cloying talk of principles (ethical, moral or spiritual) that each adheres to, but Tennyson accepts the

biological differences without negating the moral equanimity which is the implied “effect” of the quote. That the cause *creates* the Transvestism is no secret; it furthers transcendence which in Eagleton’s words, “reinforces his maleness” (79). The maleness is conjured up by relieving the princess of her masculinity, creating a causative void fulfilled with the woman’s ‘womanliness’ reinforced upon her rather than manifesting her as we might think. As the poet himself says,

For woman is not undeveloped man,

But diverse. (VII, ll. 259-60)

The word “diverse” contains the sense of both the different and the deferent; Since in her purported divergence the Transvestite becomes a man, he cannot but subscribe to the diversity himself. In his participation, he cannot “achieve full manhood” (81) as Eagleton offers us. Instead, he achieves a diversity that is neither “manhood” or womanhood, but a diversity that we would proudly call a ‘Man’ and nothing more.

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Srikanth Ganduri

A Brief Study of the Imaginative World in Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetry

Abstract

Poetry is notably concerned with human experiences. Poems are constituted of lifestyles; they belong to lifestyles, and exist for lifestyles. Poems are a sort of revelations in which the poet expresses his willingness to come back to terms with himself as a person and as a poet. Poems are records of expertise to be shared. Poets consider or think they usually move along their recorded observations, moves, ideas and emotions to the readers. The present study titled “A Brief Study of the Imaginative World in Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetry” thrives on these converging factors to establish that a creator as self has a couple of selves the trauma and worry touching on social injustices, disharmony, and ecological imbalances . This paper tries to analyse and throws light on the character and social reality of human life. The paper titled "A Brief Study of the Imaginative World in Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetry" attempts to define the poet's self, society and the truth of each with reference to selected poems.

Key Words: revelation, thrives, trauma, disharmony, ecological

Poetry of the Post-independence additionally by no means escaped the attacks of targeted skeptic critics. Establishing with Nissim Ezekiel, even the exceptional of post-Independence poetry used to be criticised as poor imitations of Keats, Tennyson, Hardy and Eliot. It is believed that

critical Indian English poetry came to be written not immediately after Independence but in the Nineteen Sixties and after. Post-independence Indian English poetry has proved more and more amazing, diversified, responsive to these instances. It has acquired a specified character and has learned its own voice. The voice is learned by using the poet's genius for intimately registering the idiom of his own world. English Poetry in India, at present makes the English language more malleable to change readily and naturally. The poets draw their issues, with conscious efforts, out of the wonderful historical Indian tradition. The collage of concrete pictures derived from the multi-dimensional aspects like science, economic system, geography, philosophy, psychology, ethics, scriptures and many others vindicates the practical traits that pervade modern day poetry. It's on this context, the researcher feels that a study needs to be undertaken on Jayanta Mahapatra who has carved a niche for himself in Indian poetry in English by merging the inward and outward modes of expression.

Jayanta Mahapatra was born on 22nd October, 1928 in Cuttack, Orissa. His father, Lamuel, used to be a sub-inspector of main colleges. He belongs to a middle class Christian loved ones. His grandfather, Chintamani, embraced Christianity in the course of the devastating famine in 1866 that shook Odisha which drove him to the verge of death. Sooner or later he staggered into a mercy camp run by the white missionaries in Cuttack. He was once furnished with food and refuge, in return for which he used to be persuaded to become a Christian, to which he yielded. As a result Jayanta Mahapatra was a Christian by inheritance and upbringing although he imbibed so much of Hindu tradition. The poet as a single man cannot recreate the society via his poetic composition. The poet, through his difficult poetic medium, cautions the persons as a

prophet that each one will not be proper with the world. Poetry can now and then be priceless in offering solutions or responses to questions which the self asks. Poetry is a harmony of the self and outside. Whether these provide a reply is problematic to assert. However the urge to confess, and unburden oneself can tie the poet's impulses to the neighbourhood and contribute to a sharing of human voice. Rather a few of Jayanta Mahapatra's poems have recorded his private history the place the poet makes an inward experience and establishes his link with the past. He attributes this trait to three brilliant modern day Indian English poets particularly A.K Ramanujan, R Parthasarathy and Kamala Das.

Mahapatra's writing is a prized heritage of the humanity. He has transcended the obstacles of place and the process of harmony beyond. The Social fact in the selected Poems of Jayanta Mahapatra is undertaken in an effort to analyse and verify whether or not the twin aspects of poetry, the inner and the outer forces have influenced the proposed writer within the making of his poetic composition. Being an Indian, Jayanta Mahapatra wants to glorify the importance of Indian poetry in English.

Hailing from Odisha, Mahapatra has made an enormous contribution to Indian English poetry with his experimental topics and native poetic idiom. Poverty, prostitution, patriarchy, crime, and the folk's pleasure and discomfort of Odisha gradually portray and tune his poems and become his emotional and spiritual self. He portrays human situations mostly and India in particular highlighting the communally debilitating issues such as corruption, social discrimination, communal disharmony, ecological imbalance etc.

The person who is born into a precise socio cultural milieu inherits effortlessly and unconsciously through the accrued

knowledge of earlier generations in the type of traditions, legends and myths. Myths are the robust embodiments of mans goals and aspirations which provide him with beliefs and help him set his pursuits in a adverse world that continuously threatens man's existence. They play a vital role as the old socio-cultural and heritage of Orissa. Human psyche acquires its form out of the affect of the previous experiences.

The internal self of Jayanta Mahapatra has been woven with his childhood and his poems are their outcome. His poems disclose the poet's strong attachment along with his childhood experiences a lot with the Oriya fairy testimonies, myths, legends and the high-quality Indian epics. The poet remembers the flash of feelings of the whispers of loneliness that surround him. His heart turns into heavy on the sight of his mother now, transformed in appearance. The poet feels the affliction of his father's loss of life in another method similarly his contemporary poet, R.Parthasarathy, in his poem "Obituary" presents an identical quandary in his family and the transformed look of his mother after his father's death.

Mahapatra varies in most cases and recalls his strong emotional attachment and friendly relationship with his father. He imprints his high recognition for his father as, he recollects in one of his poems he recollects of his father who is a teetotalter and vegetarian and takes bath twice a day, once at daybreak, the other earlier than his night obeisance to Lord Shiva in the temple.

From the poems of Mahapatra we find that the poet is very firmly rooted in the soil of Orissa. There is a quadrangle landscape formed by means of Puri, Konark, Cuttack and Bhubaneswar. We study an exceptional deal about the legends, history and fable associated with these places. Puri in Orissa is considered to be a sacred location for the

Hindus. They fervently worship Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of Orissa." Dawn at Puri "and" Main Temple Street" are the poems that underline the value of Puri and what it means to the Hindus. Widows desire to spend their last days at Puri founded on the religion that, it will fetch them their salvation. The poet expresses this sentiment that the last desire of a widow is to be cremated here.

This poem is not a collection of mere observation, a place here, a character there, an un-strenuous meditation or two, inevitable landscapes, but a determined, integrated set of selections built into the theme. For the poet, the Odishan landscape is the objective setting of his mental evolution, the phases of which get mixed up with the lyrical vocabulary of a humanist creed. (Das, 40)

The main inspiration behind *Relationship* arises is his confrontation with the existential affliction with his prodigious self. A poet's immediate and spontaneous response to the landscape of his nation, his experience of culture and culture of his land and lots of different explanations collectively define his identity. Before taking history as the launch pad of imagination a poet must imbibe the soil, its spirit, culture and pulse of its tradition which will set ablaze his flight with truth of the heart.

Mahapatra expresses a way of rootedness in the Oriyan soil. *Relationship* is the torch-bearer which sets his poetry into the mainstream of the contemporary Indian English poetry with the portrayal of the contemporary and modern spirit of increasing disillusionment which transparently unfolds his quest for identity and roots.

The twelve part epic poem *Relationship* is a sublime lyric of rootedness, alienation, loneliness and his personal guilt. The poet's attention of the feel of the past arouses in

him the question who he was. The involvement with the self and the society runs through Mahapatra's *Relationship*. Like Walt Whitman in his *Song of Myself* Mahapatra may not brazenly declare that he's "colossal" and that he "comprises multitudes". However, the underlying current of this claim and the poet's profound hindrance is with the group, the society to which he belongs.

The recollected misplaced moments for the poet revitalise his present and creates an atmosphere of awe and wonder. With the memories of the earlier, the poet involves phrases with the present. Most of his emotions in his poetry reflect his past which is obvious in *A Whiteness of Bone*. They are elegiac in tone and temper. The poet associates himself with areas of the land of his origin, rain, father, the Mahanadhi and plenty of other features of life that influence the poet's sensibility. Within the early days of his poetic profession we come across Mahapatra as a poet of love. Mahapatra's early poems converse about his frustration in love. When he was ten years old, he fell in love with a woman. The love poems were released in his two of the earliest volumes, *Close the Sky Ten by Ten* and *Swayamwara and Other Poems* (1971). Mahapatra's intimate passion for conjugal love is expressed in the poems of these two volumes. Mahapatra himself says in an editorial in *Adolescence Times*, "My early poems were exercises in a way, written mainly to please myself." (CA 227)

Thus many of the poems of Mahapatra are a search for the self. The search for the self gives a sign of continuity to his poetry. Memory helps the poet delve deep into the depths of the past that enables his search into the self. With the aid of memory he tries to discover his own roots, and find solace from the burdens of the present. The past redeems him from the fear of being faceless; from the fear of aging

and death; from the fear of the changing scenario in the present. The poetic world of Mahapatra reiterates the concept that one should journey into one's own self in order to cope up with the outer world without exploiting others and their resources.

To understand the natural surroundings one must understand oneself. In order to understand oneself one must travel inside oneself. Mahapatra's poetry, according to Bhat "makes the reader look inwards, question himself about life, its significance uncertainty and so on leading him to process of personal discovery". (Bhat 274)

Mahapatra strongly believes that personal discovery will supply a character with adequate courage to face the society and can toughen man and equip him stumble upon social evils. It will pull him out of his trapped drawback and inspire him to narrate himself with the external world. Close relationship with himself and nature will turn him inward and make him gain knowledge of the basis rationale of his inner conflicts and teach him the approaches to overcome them. Such an emotional undertaking will heal the injuries of today and will allow exploring the possibilities of constructing a promising future.

Mahapatra's commitment to the locale is much like that of Whitman's nineteenth century, Robert Frost's New England, WB Yeats's Sligo and Nissim Ezekiel's Bombay. Cuttack, Bhubaneswar and Puri form the historical past of Mahapatra poems. A poet writes in regards to the surrounding wherein he lives. His poetry serves as a link of his experiences. A broader look at his poetry permits us to realize that poet's challenge is not best to paint the snapshot, but additionally to remind men and women of their past, their roots and the benign nature that moulded and shielded them.

The poems integrated in *Shadow Space* (1997) and *Bare Face* (2000) illustrate the modes of soreness and grief. The poet assimilates his position as a man or women and as a poet in the outer world. In these volumes Mahapatra brings to the skin, the bare face and the shadow space of man or woman's dwelling in the ultra-modern world. Mahapatra's trouble from the opening has been to seize the nuances involved in creative writing. The stress of forces outside himself are heavy that the poet feels dissatisfied and doubtful of his poems when you consider that he starts realising that the forces outside create fissures in the ideals which he held high. The compelling demand of the external world on the poet and poetry drives him to paint the blackest face of woe and discover a new path both for the poet and his poetry. An inner need compels the poet to articulate concerning the forces of disorientation in the true existential circumstances, sharpening his protest towards these forces, which dehumanise, contributors leading them to an utter experience of helplessness.

The poems in these volumes articulate a lot of this. We realize that the creative expression of the poet has undergone plenty of changes that it has turn out to be much less metaphoric, less circuitous, and less indirect than it used to be in his prior volumes. Similes employed in these poems are customary and hanging. The language has assumed an intimate informality and an unalloyed simplicity. The tone of voice is more frank and open.

The spontaneous fertility of his metaphors and their profuse drift define the strength of Mahapatra's poetry. These poems look to explain how Mahapatra has lived the truth with the sensibility of the historic and mythical past. They engagingly and eminently define the connection between the poet and his place.

The poet makes a euphoric get together of the relationship between the poet and his place after securing and opening his identity. He starts to search for which means in a situation that has become meaningless. He begins watching severely at his own place, people, at his own self, his own idiom and medium. There's an undertone of soreness and suffering that springs from the poet's belief of society that makes the poems weak causing bleakness and dampness which ends up in helplessness and misery. It appears that the real world can't be redeemed or saved from its present decadence. The poet was totally desirous about his relationship with his own situation when he acquired the award for his poetic accomplishments. But he is also painfully aware of a sense of defeat that occupies the shadow-house of his heart. The poet admits this experience of defeat within the poem *Living in Orissa (Shadow Space)*.

Anything here, perhaps fatal spirit.

whatever that recollects the centuries of defeat.

To live here,

antlered in sickness and disease,

in the past of uncomprehended totems,

and the split blood of ancestors

one would wear like an amulet. (Mahapatra SS 1)

The spirit of the poet will get drained when he feels the burden of the defeated history and the burden of various ailments. The poet expresses his dejection in this poem. In spite of the feel of despair and grief, he is attached to the area in which he lives. It is the love of the land that offers him sustenance to withstand anything is dismal or unsavoury about his place. The poet's problem has been to narrate the person self to its history, to the burden of history and to the fleeting nature of time. The sector would not

open up its relationship with the character self. The man or woman has to negotiate it and generate curiosity in figuring out the dead and the living, the past and the gift concerning the world.

As Mahapatra strikes from early to later poetry, a transformation within the remedy of issues is noticed that the poet adheres to an unassuming form devoid of any experimentation. His ideas are anchored in lots of other modes of dwelling. The poet experiences at large the intricacies of life which makes it whole. He identifies himself along with his roots and his childhood expertise. He upholds the complexities of a sensitive and time bound man: his alienation, his suffering his developing experience of frustration even as he gets older fast, his perpetual worry of death and the inevitable triumph of time over him.

The poet seems to obtain and collect an awareness of the remarkable instances that social, devout and political problems find expression in his latter poetry. The poet appears to be realising that he's huge and involves multitudes. The entire range of human experience concerns, now not a fraction of it.

The self-sure tone and imagination and prescience of the poet makes approach for an extra profoundly felt dwelling place. The poetic inspiration of Mahapatra springs from his individual world and the poet is unrepentant, as he feels that his poems are for himself extra rather than for the reader. He desired to make feel of the life which was once mendacity in fragments earlier than him. He was advised to seek solutions for himself, trying out his feelings by way of putting them in opposition to the materials of the poem he knew he ought to write. His poems don't excuse themselves as verbal pictures translating into a couple of layers of meaning. Mahapatra grants a continually changing skyline

in his poems. He creates a poetic universe which is fully Indian.

The poet looks at the world and is hurt by way of the despair around and he finds it tough to hold silent about it. He becomes a poet by means of advantage of what he sees or hears and that it starts off evolving the mystifying system of the poem. Passion for writing poetry is activated when the poet is compelled by way of the urge to realize the world he lives in and recognize his possessive self. The topics are frequently parts of the topography of his possessive psyche; he explores his own feelings with painstaking and more often than not painful honesty however in no way loses sight of their universal participation.

Conclusion

Mahapatra's poems are addressed to that team of readers who're inclined to take pains to encounter the experiences which might be held captive inside the framework of the poem. With their possess respective experiences guiding them, the readers must unravel the mysteries of Mahapatra's poetic production. Mahapatra generously incites the reader's involvement within the expertise of the poem. Mahapatra's poems don't have any message expressed in well-phrased forms. The satisfactory force of Mahapatra's poetry lies within the poem itself. Making the readers seem inward, question themselves about existence, its importance, uncertainty and so forth lead them into a process of personal discovery.

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Elements of historiographical metafiction in Margaret Atwood's "the blind assassin" and Martin Amis' "Time's arrow": A comparative literary analysis

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Abstract

Historiography is the study of history as a discipline. This evaluates the methodological and epistemological aspects during the course of history or historical manifestations of a specific era. However, the past could not be proclaimed only by means of a simple narrative. In reality, the metafiction illustrates the way of reconstructing and rewriting the historical incidents. It virtually uncovers the various facets of a historical era as it not only confines itself within the dry historical facts, rather it rejuvenates the monumental events that took place and how they eventually affected the memoir of the personal belief and emotion of the people. In this work, I chose two completely different novels as far as their historical background is concerned, however, gender discrimination at the social hierarchy and classism have always been existing, both during peace and crisis, as I intricate and compare the flow of both the novels. I tried to analyze both the novels with utter importance from the historiographical point of view so as to propel them into metafictional elements and make sure how they could be brought into public perspective. Moreover, I went in depth of the theoretical aspect of both the novels and emphasized on literary techniques that have

been employed to manifest how these novels are extremely adequate to portray ‘historiographical metafiction’.

Keywords: Historiography, Metafiction, Post-modernism, Memoir, Holocaust

Introduction

Historiography is a discipline of the historical process - historical methods, biases, and authorship, to name a few. Metafiction is sometimes designated to illusory fiction as well.

Linda Hutcheon, a Canadian scholar and literary critic, coined this term for the first time.

It does mean, in her words, literary scholarship that "are well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages".

The history writing has been constantly under literary scanner with a huge degree of scrutiny, however, it is quite legitimate in each regard. This is because along with the writing of history comes bias.

Reading a history book always comes with potential bias as we don't know the accuracy that the book has to provide. Historiographical literature is the literary manner of writing that is found in several of the postmodern novels. The postmodern literary critics use this as the principle weapon in their repertoire.

However, the historiography is not only the concept. Rather, it perpetuates with the idea of metafiction. Metafiction, on the other hand, is a type of writing where the book itself adheres to the devices of fiction.

A historiographical metafiction can be of various categories: it may be a work of fiction within a fiction, a

non-linear novel, or a novel about the writing of another novel.

In the context of my study, however, both the novels like, “the blind assassin” by Margaret Atwood as well as “Time’s arrow” by Martin Amis provide all the attributes of a historiographical metafiction.

At the same time, the respective novels are completely different from each other in their literary aspects. “the blind assassin” is a story comprising a novel-within-a-novel, whereas, “Time’s arrow” is a reversal of history with respect to time that engage the readers to obtain a new look into metafictional perspective.

Literature Review

If we could revert back through time frame the conflict of literature and history has been a booming issue of academic interest since early 1970’s. Both the novels of my comparative study are the reflections of historical and social trauma that potentially ascertain the backbone of the literature, however, in quite different literary perspectives.

The first probable scholarly work has been done on the novel “the blind assassin” by Hayden White in 1973 when he published “*Metahistory*”. In this work he emphasized that history and literature are more alike than we would believe in reality, due to their textual and narrative nature: “The [historical] events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motif repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like—in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play” (“The Historical Text” 84).

White added on to it that these would involve a new dimension to look back into history and its significant events. In fact, he summarizes this as “ ‘The Modernist Event,’ by certain wobbly incidents at the beginning of the twentieth century—world wars, genocide, poverty, pollution, to name a few that dismantled the footing of traditional history writing.

White, in his work of “*Metahistory*” wrote “bear little similarity to what earlier historians conventionally took as their objects of study and do not, therefore, lend themselves to understanding by the commonsensical techniques utilized in conventional historical inquiry” (“The Modernist Event” 70). Furthermore, White went on by saying “stylistic innovations of [literary] modernism” were a direct result of the historically unconventional “modernist event,” according to White, and would therefore be better suited to represent it “than the storytelling techniques traditionally utilized by historians” (“The Modernist Event” 82).

The pioneering work has been carried out to illustrate the literary aspect of “the blind assassin” by none other than Linda Hutcheon. She postulated the literary theory of postmodernism for the first time which dislodged the previous idea of modernism. In her scholarly work “*The Poetics of Postmodernism*” she introduced and characterized the concept of “*historiographical metafiction*” to manifest a historical period with respect to literary senses and perception.

She enumerated the term “*historiographical metafiction*” by saying, historiographical metafiction does not only concern itself with history: the critical attitude towards history, caused by the traumas of modernism, is in postmodernism supplemented with issues from the “social, and political world” (Hutcheon ix). In reality, the novel

“the blind assassin” has been interwoven with the advent of postmodernism concept by Linda Hutcheon.

In recent past, however, there has been a number of scholars who eventually contradicted even with the established postmodern theory as well. Literature scholars like Astrid Erll, Ann Rigney, Birgit Neumann, and Aleida Assmann, emphasized more on cultural memoir of the novel “the blind assassin” than metafiction.

The story would have been not completed until I introduce Alan Robinson, arguably, one of the most eye catching literary critics of the concept of historiographical metafiction. He argued that the novel like “the blind assassin” is far from relevant if we compare it with regard to modern day circumstances. He criticized such novels in his scholarly works by saying, “Criticism of historical novels is still dominated by the model of historiographical metafiction. But, after the heyday of postmodernist self-reflexivity in the 1980s, this is now outdated; it is also inadequately narrow in reducing historiography to epistemological issues and in neglecting the crucial importance of temporality in the interplay between past present and past future and present past” (Robinson, *Narrating* xiii).

On the contrary, the novel “Time’s arrow” revolves around the conceptual framework that appears to rewrite the Holocaust history, providing a unique ideology insight into its perception rather than underneath traditional historical facts.

Analysis by (Fredric Jameson 1998) on Holocaust is considered arguably the first scholarly work on the novel “Time’s arrow”. He analyzed the novel into two distinct facets: The Holocaust that happened and nuclear Holocaust that seemed likely to occur. He claimed these two events

provoked the historical turn around in the twentieth century. Furthermore, he depicted that “Time’s arrow revolved around these historical point of view that eventually gave birth to postmodern climactic perceptions.

(Hollinger 2002) described this novel is postmodern in its literary aspect, however, with its rapid action and diversification from traditional linear framework, and unique styling expresses a deeper cultural crisis, comprising the scenario that holds “perception of historical truth” and “glimpse of things to come”.

The next two scholarships regarding the novel “Time’s arrow” have been carried forward by Berger and Patty respectively. Berger in his work described the novel as a reflection of “the paradigmatic instance of an apocalypse in history” (Berger 59).

On the other hand, according to Patty, the novel enlightens “radical break” of the twentieth century, a caesura, evoking a “re-thinking of the relation between past, present and future” and the rise of the Postmodern (Parry 249-51).

The scholarly works continued. Dermott McCarthy narrated “Time’s arrow” as the “metafictive horror” which perpetuates both nuclear and historical Holocaust in the same frame: the narrator’s backward journey toward the one mirrors the world’s forward movement toward the other (McCarthy 1999).

Last but not the least, Allan Weiss, one of the contemporary postmodern critics argued Time’s Arrow combines elements of the conceptual and the postmodern apocalypse: it feels like “the end of the world as we know it” but the nature of this end is “difficult if not impossible to define” (Weiss 37).

Comparative Literary Analysis between The Two Novels:

Elemental conceptualization of historiographical metafiction:

Historiographical metafiction is a term, propounded by none other than literary theorist Linda Hutcheon. The term “historiographical metafiction” was introduced by Linda Hutcheon in her essay “Beginning to Theorize the Postmodern” in 1987. Moreover, she then constructed a seminal study, known as ‘A Poetics of Postmodernism’ (1988), where she perpetuated the term by saying “those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages.”

Several of the modern contemporary novelists pertain to the concept of historiographical metafiction, starting with Michael Ondaatje, in his novels such as ‘*Running in the Family*’, ‘*In the Skin of a Lion*’, ‘*The English Patient*’ and ‘*Coming through Slaughter*’. All these novels attributed to the fact of reconstructing and rewriting history during the early- and mid-twentieth century. In reality, historiographical metafiction is the process of rewriting historical events or a period of history in such a way that has not been documented previously.

Linda Hutcheon, evaluated a series of literary concepts that might be the potential elements of historiographical metafiction. However, I would like to emphasize that the most significant among these are the use of multiple narratives or perspectives, self-reflexivity, and intertextuality, which are most likely to be amalgamated with parody.

Hutcheon, summarized this, in fact, by quoting “postmodern concern for the multiplicity and dispersion of truth(s), truth(s) relative to the specificity of place and culture” (Hutcheon 108).

Therefore, the overall idea is to manifest the reality in somewhat different propositions. Self- reflexivity, open up novels to a great degree both regarding their establishment and underneath historical facts are concerned. Hutcheon’s best part of the scholarly works has been revolving around this.

The ‘ordinary’ metafiction is being characterized by the novel itself or through the narrative commentary of the characters. On the contrary, historiographical metafiction too focusses on the factuality of the events but in a relatively diverse fashion.

The most fascinating element of historiographical metafiction is inert-textually. I wish to quote directly from her writing; historiographical metafiction “cite the intertexts of both the ‘world’ and art and, in so doing, contest the boundaries that many would unquestioningly use to separate the two” (127).

She added on to it, ‘as intertexts are often used ironically or as a parody, they are also a form of rebellion against the canon, whether historical or literary, while at the same time upholding it’ (Hutcheon 130).

Justification of historiographical metafiction in “the blind assassin”:

Margaret Atwood's “the blind assassin” is a deceptive and at the same time quite deliberate metafiction. In one word, it resembles like a “Russian doll”, it is a novel-within-a novel within another novel, blending three narrative

perspectives interwoven with newspaper clippings, a letter, and society announcements.

Notion of interchangeability/ concept of novel-within-a novel:

It focusses on these narratives to cater an interchangeable story, slowly making it become clearer over time, with the use of darkness imagery, interlaces allusions to myths, fairy tales, literature, and the Bible to explore the ways we all blindly “assassinate” in personal and political wars calling for sacrifice; making the story come to a whole at the end. Robinson clearly stated that the novel has been regarded by the author herself as a ‘collage’ (qtd. in Robinson 59).

"Ten days after the war ended, my sister Laura drove a car off a bridge." Thus the novel initiates, as does the first-person narrative of Iris Chase, who is writing from the perspective granted by old age.

She tells her own story and that of her younger sister Laura, and how from a young age any chance of simplicity was totally abolished from their lives. First by circumstances, that comprised world war and economic recession, secondly, by the invasion of ruthless, ambitious people into their respective lives.

Margaret utilized this story perspective admirably as a template character to the other two narrative perspectives. This was the first strand that she used to mingle her stories together. It has been processed in this way by the sure use of subtle hints and unlikely illusions within her dark imagery.

Another aspect of "the blind assassin" included disgraceful memories of Iris that intermingled with the tale of Chase sisters. This is the second narrative beings to take effect from Iris's mind.

It's about a man and a woman involved in a surreptitious love saga, inevitably doomed by any means, but their secret and passionate meetings are highlighted by the sci-fi fable; she tells her lover every time they meet.

Monologue of memoirs

This love affair creates a monologue of the time period when Canada was snuffing out all of the union workers. The lady is only known as the women, but it comes to the point of reckoning that Iris is writing about herself.

In another dimension of time, in a land called Sakiel-Norn, we see an entire society live in luxury but at the expense of sadistic yearly sacrifices and the hands and eyes of unlucky slave children.

The last narrative perspective is hidden nicely hidden within this story. With deft hands the children weave the most beautiful and intricate fabrics with vibrating colors and exotic textures, but after only a few years they are blinded by their prodigious work.

They are then subjected to prostitutes, thieves, and finally, assassins. The story is told in elaborate but subtle installments. Using the only characters, the blind assassin and the mute priestess as the final elemental aspect to reveal the plot of Iris's life.

In other words, whenever Iris has been restricted merely within the book, it seems that she has been blind, moreover, she was assumingly speechless around her world.

Inter-textual concept and postmodern theory

Although the principle idea of "the blind assassin" is "novel within novel", but we eventually find several articles from various newspapers and popular magazines where the objectivity of the novel might be under scanner

to establish a somewhat different proposition. However, due to the dates and references are pointed to the actual events, it more likely illustrates that the novel is embedded in historical perspectives.

I would like to like quote Linda Hutcheon's own words to emphasize this fact, "irony does indeed mark the difference from the past, but the intertextual echoing simultaneously works to affirm—textually and hermeneutically—the connection with the past" (Hutcheon 125).

The most striking example of intertextuality takes place as literary critic Hilde Staels perfectly pointed out by mentioning Herodotus (153). Herodotus was a Greek philosopher and arguably, the first historian. Staels mentioned that the stories of Herodotus comprised of facts that pertaining to the Metafictional elements (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

Incidentally, Herodotus has been cited twice: once by Iris to her reader (345) and once by the woman "in the blind assassin" to her lover (421). In both instances, they assumingly, mentioned the name of Herodotus to prove their historical knowledge, without really knowing the actual past.

It's quite ironic as they might cite the fictional stories of Herodotus, without knowing too much about that.

Therefore, we can say, there is a contrasting array of events take place here; comprising historical narratives, resurrection and reconstruction of facts that have been already done and dusted, historical phenomena, holding the undeviating evidences of time.

Establishment of historiographical metafiction in “Time’s arrow”:

Martin Amis’s novel “Time’s arrow” personifies two aspects of narrative metafiction: the vertical break up of perception that differentiates narrator and protagonist residing in the same body frame, and secondly, the allocation of instantaneousness, that, in turn, makes the illusion of past and future. In other words, this initiates the narrator to persevere in understanding the protagonist in a totally reverse manner (Amis 1987).

This historiographical metafiction, represents a remarkable resilience, catering two distinct crisis: one sneaking through and the other hovering around, procuring the mass devastation in either direction.

As a whole, however, “Time’s arrow” magnifies, arguably, the most catastrophic crisis of 20th century, by illustrating the apocalyptic and rupturing events. Not only that, Amis, through this metafiction predicts the upcoming adverse thing to come.

This Holocaust framework determines the postmodern style and the subjectivity of Time’s Arrow. Moreover, it intensifies the ruptured temporality of the narrative and the splitting of subjectivity of its main character. In reality, both of them lurking behind the narrator/protagonist’s participation in the Nazi genocide.

Time’s Arrow begins with a perception where, the principle character has become intensely embedded with his body and intricate that the first- narrator partially identifies himself in the body he resides.

The metafiction temporality dismantles the overall orientation of the rationale, considering the past and present. Healing turns into violence, the veil Holocaust has

been erased as the destruction becomes more pronounced rather than creativity.

War has been inevitable, moreover, the entire perspective of the novel assumingly trapped in a perpetual state of crisis. Catastrophic destruction pertains to the fact, owing to the shortening of history and upcoming future.

Holocaust perception in the novel "Time's arrow"

The Holocaust represents a major cultural crisis in *Time's Arrow*. To be honest, not only nuclear Holocaust, the novel "*Time's arrow*" is a unique historiographical metafiction as it reflects the overall perception of perpetual crisis, postmodern apocalyptic narrative perspective, of the 20th century.

In this regard, the novel "*Time's arrow*" has been designated as a "metafictive horror" rather a mere historiographical metafiction. Dermot McCarthy admirably analyses "*Time's arrow*" as the "perfect combination of nuclear and historical Holocaust."

I would like to quote " ". . . Amis deals with the terrifying fact that [the twentieth] century has twice confronted us with the limits of the 'thinkable'—the Holocaust of WWII and the potential holocaust of the end of the world" (McCarthy 311).

Concept of perpetual crisis

Traumatic effects as well as metafictive horror virtually echoes across the novel "*Time's arrow*. In fact, the narrator escalates exact attributes in post-World War II in America.

In this context, I would love to quote literary scholars like Vice and Diedrick, respectively: "Caught in crisis wrought confusion, the narrator interprets "medicine's therapeutic role" as "destructive" (Vice 31), "New York surgeons in

terms that seem better suited to Auschwitz doctors” (Diedrick 140).

This metafiction is a fusion of reversal of temporality, creativity as well as mass destruction of mind and soul. However, with the aid of this confusion, the novel reasons the dissemination of time frame, perspective and consequence of war. This historiographical metafiction, establishes postmodern world and genocide as the two facets of perpetual crisis.

On the contrary, “Time’s arrow” is significantly different from the rest of the narratives because it demarcates continual crisis from postmodern apocalypse. Here, both the character as well as narration are subjected to split up.

Perspective of psychological manifestation of apocalyptic rupture:

The psychological dimension of apocalyptic rupture reverberates across the overall narrative content, reflecting the split of self that differentiates narrator and protagonist. It, therefore, implying to post-traumatic perspectives that adheres to Robert Jay Lifton’s theory of psychological doubling. (Granofsky 1995)

Intertextuality of Holocaust narrative

“Time’s arrow” is a perfect scenario of intertextuality. Holocaust survival narratives,

Psychological studies, physics textbooks, and science fiction, among other textual

interconnections, all equivocally tribute to the inter textual manifesto that holds a stern resistance against conventional narratives. (Hollinger 2002)

Pivot of postmodern apocalypse

Postmodern apocalypse is the pivot around which the entire metafiction is revolved. To illustrate more we must take the reference of Allan Weiss and his idea on Canadian science fiction. There he emphasizes these science fictions are “apocalypse without closure”.

Adding on to that, the novel “Time’s arrow” resembles the elements of conceptual as well as postmodern apocalypse. It, according to Weiss, “the end of the world as we know it” but the nature of this end is “difficult if not impossible to define” (Weiss 37).

Perpetual postmodern apocalyptic conditions that escalate the narrator-protagonist framework, is a destabilizing inter-crisis. However, “Time’s arrow” in this regard, is quite different from normal narratives.

The novel’s resistance to traditional narrative frame makes it a totally different class of historiographical metafiction. Furthermore, this resistance demarcates this novel from instability and to a certain extent towards escapability of the catastrophic crisis.

“Time’s arrow” also characterizes that the postmodern apocalypse sneaks through the temporality that eventually stimulates the reader’s thinking to go beyond apocalyptic perception. It helps the readers to a great extent to contemplate towards a wider time frame and existence. Martin Amis’ “Time’s arrow” explicit this fact in a magnificent orderly fashion.

Implications of literary techniques in “Time’s arrow”

Traditional concept of time has been an integral issue for postmodern novelists. We know that writing history is a

time consuming job and the overall flow of writing of an even or an array of events, must be in forward direction.

“Time’s arrow” is quite astonishing in this context. The flow of the novel is totally reverse in its orientation which is in absolute contrast to the traditional narratives. In fact, this historiographical metafiction draws hake of an interest in this regard.

To illustrate more on it, reader must reshape the order of sentences to understand the meaningfulness that is hidden underneath. In “Time’s arrow” the forward sentence becomes backward or the reader has to read the first sentence as the last one.

“Unwrap” clams itself to be as “wrap”, “walk away” appears to be “come in”, to name a few. To emphasize more on that, I must include the self-citation by the author himself. “Although the narrator hears the conversation backwards, he understands in the progress of time that “the pitiable chirruping [is] . . . , in fact, human speech” (Amis, Arrow 14)

Not only conversations, the circumstances are also reversed in a backward fashion in “Time’s arrow”. However, the most intriguing aspect of reversal is evident in the moral meaning. Incidentally, Amis himself quoted during an interview, “the arrow of time is not just the arrow of reason but the arrow of morality and you turn anything around, all violence, all morality is controlled by the arrow of time and becomes its opposite” (Amis, Interview).

The major reason behind the use of reverse literary narrative frame in this novel is to portray the Holocaust changes that propel through it. “Time’s Arrow” “represents a longing for “undo[ing]” the Holocaust” (McGlothin 220; Heiler 248).

We know that during catastrophe of World War II bulk of the Europe was devastated, thousands of houses, sculptures were abolished and people were in a state of utter disappointment. Here Martin Amis through ‘‘Time’s arrow’’ tries to resurrect history and propels back through time machine.

If time was taken back, cities and buildings would be restored, and people would come back to life. Under these conditions Odilo Unverdorben, who is a uniformed doctor-soldier, reaches Auschwitz, ‘‘fused for a preternatural purpose’’ (Amis, Arrow 124): ‘‘To dream a race. To make people from the weather. From thunder and from lightning. With gas, with electricity, with shit, with fire’’ (Amis, Arrow 128).

A feature of Time’s Arrow that separates it from traditional historical fiction is the introduction of the narrator how he has been employed. In traditional narratives the narrator is a unified self who synthesizes objective knowledge about the past, and it’s subsequent objectively. In Time’s Arrow, on contrary to that, the undefined narrator, has a limited scenario of the world revolving around him, which constitutes a controversy about the conventional aspect of the narrator.

Discussion

In the novel ‘‘the Blind Assassin’’, Atwood caters the subjectivity of truth and reality. The events are portrayed differently according to the different characters’ perspectives on the events and circumstances.

Furthermore, Atwood manifests various literary perspectives and leads the reader to believe in one thing, when in the end the contrary is the other. Ultimately, however, the truth is shown to be what the reader thinks, as

the author and characters are not reliable. The main narrative, which is written by the character Iris, shows her take on things. Iris also portrays the other characters' perspectives such as Winifred and Laura. The reader can only rely on Iris, because she is the only one the reader has access to.

Since the reader can only rely on Iris, the reader doesn't take what she says for granted. However, Iris brings out other perspectives of the events and that's what causes the reader to question her truth.

“The Blind Assassin”, like 1930s and 40s, gender discrimination and classism in social hierarchy, are still very much evident today, both from the perspectives of peace and war, crisis. Therefore, that metafiction that represents such social discourse should be envisaged in cultural memory.

Examples of historiographical metafiction, such as “the blind assassin”, is tailor-made for this. Novels like these, proclaim an array of events of an era that characterize fictions of memory. Historiographical metafiction can sustain a very important part in bringing forgotten pasts back to the public consciousness.

“The Blind Assassin” is a class apart as it stamps its authority in an unique way to try to claim a space for feminism and class criticism in history, expressing sorrow and resurrect the way common women and people used to be treated at the beginning of twentieth century.

A reversal of time frame is very much pronounced, escalating various contemporary events. Honestly speaking, these incidents were not catastrophic always, however, both protagonists lose loved ones during war and the novel bring in major attributes to different ways in which war victims are memorized.

“The blind assassin” keeps asking the readers to rejuvenate that the language of victims, survivors, perpetrators, and perpetrated is not reserved for war. Margaret Atwood rather focusses more on gender and class keeping the contemporary context in mind.

This counter-history is not only the reflection of a solitary fact, rather it resembles one among several narrative metafiction. At the same time, it keeps sizable room for the most likely futuristic sagas of the past context.

“Time’s Arrow”, on the other hand, is reconstructing and rewriting the Holocaust to provide a totally new model, hovering around the morality of the mass destruction by the implication of literary experimental techniques.

The reversal of narrative events as well as the narrator draw the reader’s attention to its process of writing, which by all means characterizes the novel as historiographical metafiction. Moreover, “Time’s arrow” is a classic example of inter-textuality.

Literary critics argue that “Time’s Arrow” exhibits backward narration against forward narratives of conventional historiography. This metafiction is the overall application of a fragmented narrator against the traditional role of the historian who is supposed to be undefined. Moreover, self-conscious intertextuality against the claims of objectivity of the metafictional perspective is the ethos of this historiographical novel.

However, intricate the facts, we find that there are potentials that suggest that Time’s Arrow does not seem to put much effort in the “problematization of traditional history writing”. The main concern of Time’s Arrow is not to criticize the practice of conventional history writing.

As a whole, this novel employs backward narration to create a moral attribute regarding the Holocaust to establish that it was nothing but a deviation from the expected progressive history.

Conclusion

Historiographical metafiction is a huge area of postmodern literature is concerned. Therefore, we can easily state that not all the novels resembling historical narratives designate themselves under this label. In this context, Ansgar Nünning clearly states, “Hutcheon’s characterization of postmodernist fiction fails to answer the question of where to draw the line between historiographical metafiction and other narrative and generic modes for presenting past and present reality in fiction” (220).

Another important aspect is the choice of two novels which are apparently looking like meet all the proportions of historiographical metafiction, however, they are in many respects diverse from the originality of the concept of metafiction. Therefore, we should be firm enough to reconsider each postmodern historical novel before we put them in the category of historiographical metafiction.

To add to that, this study would facilitate the other contemporary literary scholars to propel themselves to carry out such kind of comparative studies. In doing so, they will surely develop new ideas and techniques in order to dissect the historiographical metafiction like “the blind assassin” and “Time’s arrow”.

Last but not the least, in both the novels of my work, literary enlightenment and postmodern aspect have been manifested. Therefore, sizable amount of further research must be conducted to portray such wide field of historiography. At the same time, scholars should be

encouraged to pick similar kind of novels in the context of contemporary history writing.

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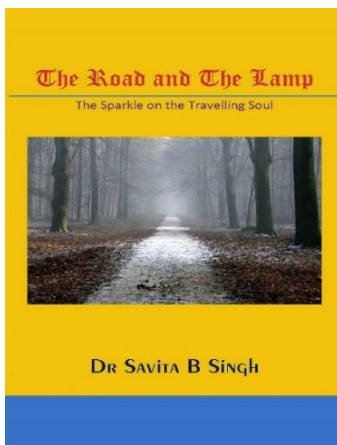


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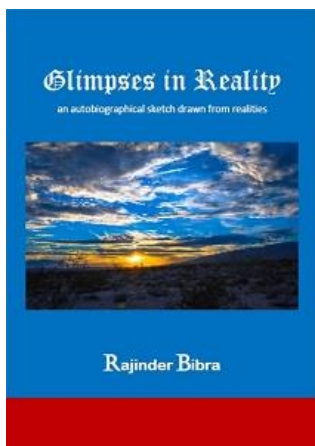


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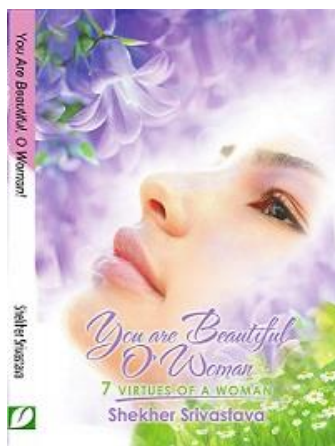


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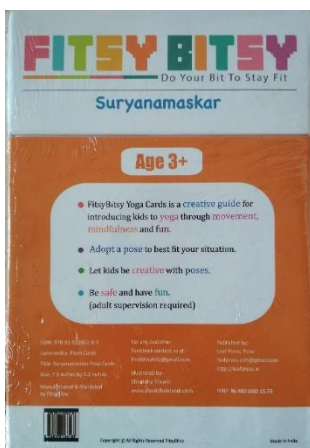
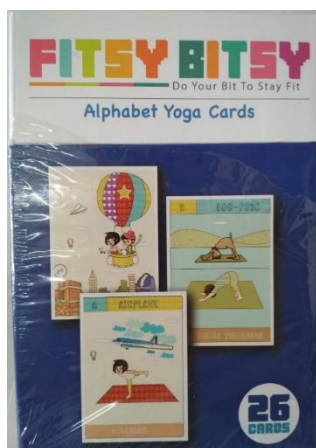
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Brandon Marlon

Gardens of Delight

In all the storied bastions of hedonism across the East, nothing approached the gusto of Babylonian celebrations. To satisfy the national vanity, ostentatious orgies abounded, pagan pageantry designed to make the supernal gods—Marduk, Adad, Ea, Shamash, Ishtar, Tammuz, Zarpanit, Nabu and Nergal—peer down from heaven in envy of worldly extravagance. Babylon's revelry put rivals to shame, supplying them at once with inspiration to ever greater debauchery and despair at the impossibility of ever matching such decadence. Few peoples even in their wildest dreams could fathom the extent of licentiousness involved; none else could readily afford it. What Babylon wasted in a week could sustain the treasures of lesser locales for years.

Brimful of youthful energies, Nebuchadrezzar wasted no time in restoring the kingdom's opulent temples. Foremost in his plans was renovating the enormous ziggurat Etemenanki at Babylon, renowned from old as the Tower of Babel. The gigantic structure overlooking the landscape had originally been designed as a platform bridging heaven and earth, a focal point for the city symbolizing its power and that of its god. As king, Nebuchadrezzar would soon become nominal chief priest of the national god, and his toddler heir, crown prince Amel-Marduk, chief priest to the town god. In Babylon, these deities were one and the same: Marduk, titled Bel, lord and chief of the pantheon.

Esagila, the companion temple complex to lofty Etemenanki, likewise appealed for refurbishment and so

Nebuchadrezzar indulged by ordering the finest woods, most precious metals, and valuable gemstones for its glorification. Royal treasurers expostulated at this insistence on overlaying the chipped walls of the grandiose central chapel with gold, lapis, and marble, gilding the roof in addition to the golden images of Marduk.

“Everything must be without rival!” Nebuchadrezzar roared at his underlings, soon to become a familiar refrain in all his development projects.

The glory of the gods depended on the fruitfulness of their cities and townships, with each divinity possessing lands where grain was harvested, flocks and herds pastured, granaries heaped up, and storehouses stockpiled with their share of spoils. In this dynamic between deity and city it was ultimately unclear which was benefactor and which beneficiary. Babylonians considered the relationship mutually advantageous, accounting for its endurance.

Nebuchadrezzar toured his vast estates, determined to raise living standards across the country. Consulting with counselors, he realized that irrigation, arable land, and engineering practices were essential for successful crops. Preliminary surveys were commissioned and advance plans drawn up. Land measurements were taken and graphic methods plotted on draughts. Leveling instruments were forged, and dams, levies, and embankments employed to useful effect. The crown prince saw to the maintenance of the canals he had created to enrich and drain the land, aware that these admirable waterways required continuous upkeep due to soft ground and friable banks. The age-old Appar Canal built by Hammurabi to link the Tigris with the Euphrates at the city gates was in dire disrepair; Nebuchadrezzar now conscripted gangs of slaves and prisoners-of-war to restore its original width and shore up

its banks with bitumen and imported stone. Remarkably, the Babylonian provinces were brought back to life.

Within the capital, newly-baked square bricks bonded with bitumen replaced the inferior, sun-dried variety throughout the royal palace. Polished cedar beams lined the roofs and brilliant tiles of glazed enamel adorned the walls. Skilled artisans detailed with gold, silver, and priceless jewels to accent the opulent décor. The spacious palace stood in stark contrast to the overcrowded residential quarters of attached and semi-detached rectangular houses of inferior sun-dried bricks with roofs supported by beams. With wood as an article of value sometimes offered as pledge or payment, many houses had no door at all, and all homes opened directly onto the vital passages and byways. Peasants hardly complained, for even the lowly of Babylon were envied by the lofty elsewhere. Still, as Nebuchadnezzar breakfasted atop the palace rooftop on lime custard and buttered sourdough bread, he disdained the eyesores across the Processional Way, enjoining that lengthy avenues be widened and slum areas gentrified or demolished. Before long this was accomplished, as was a moat dug around the outer wall to further deter would-be invaders, its water resourcefully pumped in from the Euphrates. Bridges assembled now in peacetime were ingeniously designed for easy dismantling should the city be besieged.

Favoring springtime's crisp morning air, Nebuchadnezzar routinely sauntered around the city walls keeping an eye on construction progress, by turns admonishing and congratulating his architects, engineers, and foremen, observing here, critiquing there, always contributing ideas. Unhappy with the density of the copper door at Zababa Gate in the southeast, he ordered massive bronze doors installed to fortify each of Babylon's eight gates, and a third mighty wall with accompanying moat erected as a

further safeguard along the eastern portion of the city. A builder at heart, the young royal relished every opportunity to sneak away from self-serving petitions of obsequious courtiers and instead personally supervise work crews, unwilling to compromise on his vision of grandeur.

More than anything else in the city, the Hanging Gardens captured the imagination of residents and visitors alike. Here urban beautification surpassed itself, and Nebuchadrezzar's aim was no less than a desert spectacle. He tired of his homesick Median wife Amytis searching the horizon for a glimpse of the verdurous Zagros Mountains, and decided to appease her with a likeness of her native mountain landscape.

Amytis held her breath, marveling as her vicarious paradise arose upon an artificial hillside of rising tiers abundant with verdant groves. Earth-covered terraces shaded with assorted trees and shrubs gave the impression of jungle overgrowth swallowing the symmetrical constructions of men. Delighting observers from near and far, the lavish profusion of greenery hid specially built irrigation systems providing an ongoing water supply, keeping gardens fertile and lawns lush. Well-appointed waterfalls tumbled over smooth marble into willow ponds resplendent with pink flower petals, interspersed between blossoming plant vines and leaves dangling over edges. Blooming hydrangea and chrysanthemum stood out against a backdrop of greens in every tint and hue. Soft grasses, tilting palms, and arcaded courtyards completed the idyllic atmosphere of the grounds, whose illustrious repute spread throughout the region.

More than an attraction, the gardens were a nightly retreat for loving husband and wife seeking relief from the day's duties.

“The gods will envy my queen, to whom such homage is paid,” Nebuchadrezzar teased.

“They’re not my gods; let them seethe with desire,” Amytis retorted, frolicking in moist grass. “I won’t be begrudged my consolation.”

Her homesickness dispelled, the crown princess regularly luxuriated in her oasis, ever soothed by its bliss.

Breathtaking in person, Amytis delighted her subjects. The mountain gods of Media were in a bountiful mood at her birth, granting her immeasurable exquisiteness. With nimble arms, supple breasts, curvaceous hips, and lissome legs, Amytis had no counterpart in elegance among native Babylonian women. Long, sable hair draped her striking face, framing hazel eyes and lips painted thistle. A tiny birthmark dotted her upper lip, adding to her unique beauty. Her auburn skin was enhanced by the gracious sun. Only the finest silk and satin fabrics imported from the port of Zaitun graced her lithe figure. At home on the palace’s rooftop terrace and in the Hanging Gardens, she was always seen donning a flowing gown or lustrous robe wrapped tautly around her svelte frame. Each morn she speckled her neck with spikenard or patchouli perfume and every night she bathed in a pool covered with lilac petals, maidservants rubbing scented ointment into her armpits, genitals, and feet. A large amethyst—a present from her husband at their betrothal—hung from her neck, its oval surface absorbing the day’s light and reflecting violet rays against her bosom. Garnet rings embellished her fingers, crowning her hands with radiance.

Amytis’ fortunate combination of grace and sensuality opened many doors throughout her life, and she walked through them all. Her sophisticated bearing had delivered her to the palace in Babylon, where her every move set an

example for avid followers. From the beginning of their marriage Nebuchadrezzar appreciated his wife's independent strength. He admired how she cultivated pastimes every so often, indulging interests in sailing, sculpting, and dancing. He never denied her any whim or fancy, allowing her assertive personality free rein. After all, he mused, Amytis the Median was a queen of fire, and what mortal could command a flame?

One notorious haunt scrupulously avoided by the royal couple was the open-air shrine to Zarpanit, Marduk's consort, a glorified brothel of ill repute universally attended by all castes of society. Unlike the dank bordellos tucked away at the fringes of the city's odorous residential quarters, this capacious pleasure house afforded its devotees the guise of sanctity. Assiduous servants energetically scoured and scrubbed granite-tiled floors till dawn, stained as they were with the chronic stickiness of wine and menstrual blood, salty sweat and dried semen. The sundry glories of the previous eve were guaranteed to include standard orgiastic carnalities of rabid threesomes, simultaneous penetrations, group onanism, and arbitrary sodomy, but depending on the coital energies of the night's participants may well have also involved a series of pseudo-sacred acts as the gang-raping of unsuspecting vestal virgins and raunchy bestiality with unnerved animals. Revelers exulted in the random couplings of masters and slaves, strangers and acquaintances, in the overflow of vinous concoctions, in the rhythmic drumming and gyrations of limber belly dancers.

None crept away into the night unattended to. Every man's pulsating loins met with rapturous satisfaction. Every woman's urging innards knew the repeated thrusts and releases of various accomplices. Carousing city elders found their trembling hands on the soft flesh of

apprehensive young girls whose opportunistic parents urged them onward with offhanded approval. Lowly army clerks found social comeuppance in the exclaiming sighs of wealthy dowager matrons deprived of rapture by their senile husbands rotting at home. Court eunuchs avenged their pride by burrowing their starving mouths into the unfolding crotches of neglected royal concubines frequenting the lust shrine surreptitiously. Fulfillment was the orgasmic order of the night. Every nipple knew its quavering tongue, every orifice its forceful guest. Even more than politics, religion, and war, the ecstasy and relief of carnal pleasure united a riven citizenry into a cohesive whole. And so vanity and venereal disease found their nightly way into the libertine lives of a free-spirited city.

Belshazzar's Banquet

From the outset of Belshazzar's regency a policy of profligacy had been writ large across Babylon. The current Akitu festival was a surpassing affair easily outdoing his prior indulgences. Dispensing with his indoctrination into the morbid cult of Sin, the crown prince proved a loyal friend to frippery and was only too pleased to render *all* the gods their dues.

On the twelfth and last night of celebrations, Belshazzar reclined on his plush divan in the imperial palace's crowded banquet hall, sucking on the polished toes of his Nubian concubine as he oversaw mingling nobles and consorts. A thousand of his closest acquaintances joined the regent at his lavish feast, priests and prostitutes, counselors and administrators.

Doting slaves ensured delicacies of skewered locusts and crocodile liver made the rounds. Displayed on long tables were mountainous platters of roasted pig, grilled lamb, charred goat, braised duck, boiled geese, and spiced fowl. Atop multi-storey desert tables towered stacked trays of flaked pastries, heaps of almonds, pistachios, and carob chips, mounds of blueberries and blackberries, cranberries and cherries, apricots and peaches, plums and pomegranates, cantaloupe and honeydew, and sticky mounds of honey dates and fresh figs.

Mouthwatering sights inebriated oenophiles even before they touched the wine, flowing like water from sculpted fountains. Here was decadence befitting Babylon's majesty! *Had even great Nebuchadrezzar ever hosted such an affair?*, Belshazzar wondered, eager to exceed the debaucheries of yesteryear. As belly dancers and fire-eaters blended amid courtiers and diviners, he trusted his extravagances would be a night not soon forgotten.

“Bring the golden and silver vessels,” he commanded, quaffing from his chalice.

Eunuchs forwarded solid gold and unalloyed silver vessels, items long ago expropriated by Nebuchadrezzar from Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem and carefully preserved in Esagila’s treasury. Only superstition had kept Marduk’s priests from using the articles for their own god’s benefit. Belshazzar flaunted immunity in the face of foreign gods, proposing a toast.

“To the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone!” he enounced, a pithy paean to the pantheon whose members he could barely enumerate while sober.

The subtle slight against custom was pardoned in the free spirit of the occasion. Draining their cups to the dregs, guests exuded all the affectations of wine-induced camaraderie. Drunken revelers bumped into each other in slipshod gaiety. Antechambers filled with the overindulgent wallowing in their vomit, keeping slaves overworked. As attendees lazed on lounges, spilling secrets hidden by sobriety, a shocking occurrence brought all carousing to a premature end: a phantasmal hand appeared in the shadows of the plastered wall near the candelabrum, just above the unsuspecting regent’s head. Gasps and cries relayed throughout the vast hall. A baffled Belshazzar finally rose and turned to see for himself the cause of the uproar.

“A genie! A demon!” some shouted as the regent lurched, astounded to view such sorcery up close. The fingers of the hand were writing in Hebraic letters a concise notation in scarlet characters. Belshazzar’s countenance turned anemic. Though the obscure scribbling meant nothing to him, the stark red against the white plaster left an indelible impression on his frightened senses. Convulsions made it impossible for him to remain on his feet.

“All enchanters, magicians, and astrologers come forward!” he barked.

Hesitantly the wise men of Babylon drew close, drowsy or otherwise indisposed, petrified by the menacing writing on the wall. Seeing their foreboding visages, Belshazzar withdrew from the wall, saliva spilling from his quavering lower lip, his bulging eyes enveloped with dread.

“Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple with a gold chain placed around his neck, and will be made third ruler in the empire,” he pledged.

Diviners racked their brains to learn its meaning, conferring to achieve a consensus on a plausible translation. They struggled just to pronounce the lettering looming large before all.

“Mamtus...? Nankpy...? Ealrin...?”

Most wise men could read the foreign and ancient Hebrew alphabet, but none were capable of comprehending the script’s significance or interpreting its cipher.

“Is there none who can explain this to me???” Belshazzar whinged, seeing by their stupefied glances and nervous shifting that the enigma eluded them.

Belshazzar stared at the writing, swallowing hard as the scarlet dripped down the white plaster in macabre manner. Overhearing the clamor, Empress Nitokris slithered into the hall like a creeping cobra, unseen by attendees. She marveled at the message.

“Regent, live forever!” she exclaimed. “Don’t be alarmed or look so pale! There’s a man in your empire who has the divine spirit within. In your father’s day he was found to possess insight, intelligence, and wisdom like that of the gods. Emperor Nebuchadnezzar—your father—appointed

him chief of magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners. This Daniel was found to have keen knowledge and understanding, and the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Summon Daniel, and he'll declare what the writing means."

Again the august audience was mystified. *Nebuchadrezzar was Belshazzar's father???* *How could the empress misspeak so glaringly??* Were their drunken senses unreliable? Murmurs circulated around the room. Sauced minds spun at the tantalizing implication. More concerned by supernatural events than by his own indecent origins, Belshazzar speculated.

"Daniel, you say...?" he echoed, with a faint recollection. "Very well, mother."

Daniel, beckoned from the modest inn where he had been staying and praying for guidance since his audience with Nabonidus, was now whisked to the palace by chariot and rushed into the banquet hall teeming with people and puzzlement. Belshazzar gazed at the elegant eighty year-old diviner with flowing white hair braided tidily and trim white beard.

"Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the emperor brought from Judah?"

Daniel nodded, withholding the standard full bow. He had no intention of making obeisance to this degenerate, nor at his advanced age would his back bend for any earthly ruler. Belshazzar uneasily sensed that Daniel looked through him, not at him, a sign of contempt.

"I've heard that the divine spirit's within you and that you possess insight, intelligence, and outstanding wisdom. All the wise men were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they failed to explain it. Now

I've heard that you're able to interpret and solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you'll be clothed in purple with a gold chain placed around your neck, and will be made third ruler in the empire."

The exceptional proposition of ruling over Babylonia with Belshazzar and Nabonidus held considerably less than the expected appeal for Daniel.

"Keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to another. I'll read the writing for the regent and tell him what it means," Daniel volunteered before the hushed crowd. "Regent, the Most High gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness, glory and splendor. Because of the high position He gave him, all the peoples and nations of every language revered and feared him. Those the emperor wished to put to death, he put to death; those he wished to spare, he spared; those he wished to promote, he promoted; and those he wished to humble, he humbled. But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his imperial throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven from humankind and given the mind of an animal; he lived with wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he acknowledged that the Most High reigns sovereign over the empires of human beings and sets over them anyone He wishes.

"But you his son, Belshazzar, haven't humbled yourself, though you knew all of this. Instead, you've set yourself up against the Master of Heaven and Earth. You had the vessels from His temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, wives, and concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor understand. But you didn't honor the Lord who holds in His hands your life

and fate, so He sent the hand that wrote the inscription that reads, ‘Mene, Mene, Tekel, Uparsin.’”

Humiliated, the wise men reexamined the Hebraic characters. Though their reading was sound, they did not perceive that the text was an anagram, three lines one under the other, each consisting of one word of five letters. Reading from right to left, as per Hebrew usage, in this instance rendered gibberish. Only by reading downwards had Daniel acquired the answer.

“The literal translation is, ‘A mina, a mina, a shekel, and half-shekels,’” he explained, referring to coins and weights. “But only the letters are Hebrew; each word is actually Aramaic, hiding its double meaning. This is what the words mean: Mene—the Almighty has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end; Tekel—you’ve been weighed in the balances, and are found wanting; Uparsin—and your empire is to be divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

Commotion arose among attendees abhorred by the dire declaration. For once Belshazzar resented Nabonidus’ absence from the capital, loath to preside over the demise of their domain.

“Can the decree be averted?” Nitokris inquired, her heart pounding in her ears.

“Babylonia will be broken by Persian power,” Daniel iterated.

In a gesture of friendship he bade Nitokris farewell, then turned to leave, thinking nothing of requesting permission. In his elderly state flouting authority was natural: fear of danger to his life had long ago given way to the more harrowing frailties of old age.

“Wait,” Belshazzar insisted. The crown prince signaled to servants, who forwarded a purple cloak and chain of gold, clothing Daniel with them.

“Behold, the third ruler of Babylonia!” proclaimed the regent, hoping that by keeping his promise and honoring Daniel the angered god might be appeased and accept his late contrition. Without so much as an expression of gratitude, Daniel split the thronged hall, exiting the palace.

Word of the army’s defeat had meanwhile seeped into Babylon as distraught survivors recounted dramatic tales of battle and bloodshed, offering their injuries as evidence. Worse still, Cyrus was on the march. Babylonians amassed in the avenues to share their collective grief and alarm, stirring themselves into a popular panic. As Daniel emerged from the palace into the night and ambled along the Processional Way, his feet rustling fallen tinsel from the Akitu festival, a torch-bearing mob trailed him, recognizing the beloved former governor as he removed the gold chain and purple cloak, nonchalantly adorning a winged-lion statue with them by Ishtar Gate.

“Why do you forsake these precious symbols of power??” a curious merchant asked.

“Have you no respect for the glory of Babylon or its rulers???”

“I’ve sacrificed too much to Babylon and its rulers to be cowed by respect,” Daniel enlightened. “Come, all those courageous among you, learn just what I mean!”

A zealous Daniel herded the agitated people at the city’s northeast corner, beyond darkened residential quarters, traversing the bridge over the canal dividing the capital. At length they reached the dirt-strewn district with its narrow streets ending near the distinctive mound.

“Discover what foundation Babylon has, courtesy of Emperor Nabonidus, high priest of Sin!” he exhorted, clearing shrubs camouflaging the boulder’s double crescent moon symbol.

Once those stouter among the crowd displaced the stone, Daniel quickly led them through the aperture, descending into the hidden dominion. One by one the people followed, spiraling down the staircase into the illuminated pool. They were awestruck by the chalk images on the bell cave walls. Amazement transformed into horror as they navigated beyond hazardous guano and stalagmites through the maze of subterranean caverns and passages, stumbling upon piled teeth, shorn hair, rotten bones, and worm-infested skulls.

A chorus of shrieks resounded as they discovered gruesome cadavers of slaves and foreigners who had outlived their usefulness, their decomposing skeletons overrun by roaches. Beside these were chambers with the heaped remains of hybrid beasts, abominable creatures consumed by necrosis. Terrified Babylonians impulsively flung their torches at hideous sights throughout the underground lair, unleashing their revulsion and rage.

Encountering a grisly series of bloodstained apparatuses, they clung to each other in fear and fury as they roamed intricate channels, setting everything ablaze, pausing before stranded bamboo rafts stuck in the mud where formerly they floated along watery passageways. Daniel was surprised that the stream had all but dried up, but made good use of favorable fortune.

“Come quickly!” he urged, dragging with others the flammable rafts into the adjacent central chamber of worship where masks lay atop the altar. “Here this hell ends!” he avowed.

On his mark, the revolted mob flung firebrands and slurs against the stacked rafts which burst into flames, consigning the sanctuary of Sin to conflagration. Daniel steered them away from the inferno, hastening the people toward the elongated tunnel eventuating at the Euphrates.

“The water level has fallen...!” he detected, thanking heaven even as he prodded each and all onward to safety and freedom.

“The level’s just right,” Darius confirmed, standing in thigh-high water and staring up at Cyrus crouching on the riverbank. “The dam has done its job well...!”

“Then so must we. We’ve no time to lose,” Cyrus whispered, signaling his army to enter the Euphrates under his uncle’s lead. “Hurry, we mustn’t keep history waiting.”

Splashing lightly as they stepped down into the riverbed, the Persian army trudged steadily through water and muddy earth, dousing their torches and maintaining complete silence as they crept within sight of Babylon’s formidable fortifications. Darius relied on hand signals in conducting them past the northern citadel, whose surprised sentries were sniped down with little effort. Before long the perimeter had been penetrated. Darius pushed forward toward the central bridge over the Euphrates, spanning the eastern and western halves of Babylon.

He charged the vanguard with securing bridgeheads to the suburban east, then led the bulk of the army ashore on the metropolitan west side, directing them to predetermined positions atop the city walls, beneath each gate, beside every canal bridge, within the grand bazaar and central square, along the Processional Way, and outside all entrances to Esagila and Etemenanki.

While battalions fanned out across the capital, Darius headed an elite regiment against the palace, whose overwhelmed guards were disposed of by swarming commandos. They sped from room to room, down one hallway after another, ultimately reaching the packed banquet hall and startling the drunken horde from its stupor. Darius scrambled through the multitude, targeting the regally-attired regent, now half-unconscious on his plush divan. The crown prince spotted his assailants and roused himself to his feet.

“Guards!” he shouted, his speech slurred.

Whizzing arrows from Persian bows neutralized guards attending their master. Belshazzar grabbed a hidden dagger from his robe and lunged at his foes with none of his former agility, swiping maniacally until his soft stomach met with the thrusting iron of a Median sword.

“Ah, the thief’s fate,” Darius glared, plunging his blade deeper into the regent’s flesh. “Kashaya regrets being unable to attend, I assure you, but sends her regards,” he scowled, pulling his bloodied weapon from Belshazzar’s belly and watching him fall to the floor with a dull thud.

Nitokris, aware of upheaval in the streets below her window, had maidservants apply fine cosmetics to her face, coloring her eyelashes with silvery stibium and powdering her cheeks with carminic rouge. The empress would meet her conquerors as a refined matron, on her own terms.

She evaded Darius’ forces inside the palace, managing to reach the secret passage leading to the Processional Way. She rushed through the concealed corridor, feeling very differently, as if a foreigner in her native land. Emerging onto the grand boulevard crawling with Persian fighters, she was seized by watchful officers who detained her at Ishtar Gate, where her attention was drawn to a winged-lion

appareled with purple cloak and gold chain. Black crows needled threads with their beaks, pecking at the shiny metal. *How the mighty have fallen*, she scoffed, sighing at the dissipation of illusion. Above the lion on the gate's curving arch hung the engraved words of her father, in posthumous defiance of changing times:

I, Nebuchadnezzar, laid the foundation of the gates down to the groundwater level and had them built out of pure blue stone. Upon the walls in the inner room of the gate are bulls and dragons and thus I adorned them with splendor for mankind to behold in awe...



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Zia Marshall

Loving Anjali

Hyderabad, 1992

“Sit still, Anjali. I’m almost done,” Aayushi swiftly braided her little sister’s long hair into two glossy plaits that swung down her shoulders. Snatching two strips of white ribbon, she neatly tied two bows at the tail end of the plaits. Then she stepped back and surveyed the result. “I think I got them right. But it would be easier if you cut your hair, Anjali,” she grumbled. “You wake up so late every morning and I am always afraid we’ll miss the bus because we need to plait your hair.”

“Oh, I love my long hair, Didi,” Anjali said. “I don’t want short hair. Ma wanted to cut it. She is so mean, Di.”

“Hush Anjali, don’t speak about our mother like that,” Aayushi sternly admonished her little sister.

“Ma is like a step mother, Didi,” Anjali continued, staring earnestly at her beloved sister.

Aayushi’s stern face dissolved into a smile and the two sisters giggled.

“Ma wants you to cut your hair because she doesn’t have time to plait it in the morning, Anjali,” Aayushi explained, sobering up. It wouldn’t do to allow Anjali to speak badly about their mother.

“But you have time to plait it, Didi. Can you tell Ma? She’ll listen to you.”

Anjali stared at her sister beseechingly. As usual, Aayushi smiled and gave in to the mute appeal in Anjali's doe-like brown eyes.

"I won't let Ma cut your hair. Now hurry up! We have to be quick if we want to catch the bus. Here, let me hold your bag. Now hold my hand and walk as quickly as I am walking."

The bus was already at the stop by the time the two sisters got there. They tumbled into the bus and made their way to their usual seats at the back of the bus.

Aayushi looked out of the window as the bus wended its way through the familiar streets of Hyderabad. At this time in the morning, there wasn't much traffic on the roads. The shops that lined the streets were mostly shut. They passed a Hanuman temple and outside it, hawkers were standing beside carts laden with fresh water-sprinkled roses. There were other hawkers selling coconuts, apples and bananas. Aayushi watched as people haggled with the hawkers over the price of flowers and fruits and then entered the temple with their offerings in their hands. She loved these early morning sights as they made their way to school. Often she sat with a diary in her hands, noting down the things she saw. Aayushi loved writing, and someday, when she was all grown-up, she had decided that she would be an author and write novels. For now, she was content to read almost everything she could lay her hands on. She enjoyed observing people and things and making notes in her diary. She saw this as preparation for the time when she would finally write her novel.

"Didi," Anjali said.

Aayushi turned from the window and glanced down at her sister.

"I heard Ma and Papa talking about Geeta Maasi. They said she has taken a larger share of prop...prop...I don't know that word. What did they mean, Didi?"

Aayushi took her little sister's hand in hers. "These are grown-up things, Anjali. You don't need to worry your little head about it."

"But what does 'share' mean, Didi? Did Geeta Maasi say no to sharing something with them?"

"No, Anjali, it just means that Geeta Maasi got more of Nana's property. I mean his house and land. Ma and Papa didn't like it, that's all. Don't worry too much about these grown-up things, Anjali," Aayushi assured her sister, stroking her hand.

"But Didi, Ma and Papa said they would never talk to Geeta Maasi again!" Anjali stared at her sister with large, round eyes. "They also said something about ... about cutting a tie. I didn't understand that. Papa wears ties to office and so does Pramod Maasa. Why would they cut their ties?"

Aayushi smiled. Anjali had all the artless innocence of an eight-year-old and a penchant for taking words literally, which often made the rest of them laugh. She patted Anjali reassuringly on the back. "Grown-ups fight at times, Anjali. You mustn't worry about it."

"But, Didi," Anjali said anxiously. "I'm scared. If Ma and Papa are '*katti*' with Geeta Maasi, then we can't play with Abhi and Meera. I like going to Geeta Maasi's house on Sunday and playing with Abhi and Meera."

Aayushi didn't want to lie to Anjali. "We may not go to Geeta Maasi's for some time, Anjali," Aayushi said. "But don't worry about it. I'm sure things will become fine and Ma and Papa will be speaking to her soon."

“Why do grown-ups fight over things like money, Didi? It seems so silly, doesn’t it?” Anjali said artlessly. “We would never fight, would we? If I wanted something, you would just give it to me, right? And even if you didn’t, we wouldn’t be ‘*katti*’ because of that!”

Aayushi smiled and shook her head. She pulled her little sister towards her and hugged her tightly. They passed the rest of the journey in silence.

That evening, Anjali walked into Aayushi’s room with a couple of books in her hand.

“Didi! You have to help me with my homework.”

Aayushi sighed. Anjali was still in Grade 3, but Aayushi, in grade 8, had exams coming up in a few days.

“Why don’t you ask Ma to help you?” she coaxed.

“No Didi, I want you to help me, please.”

Aayushi shook her head. “Please Anjali, I really have so much to study. Just this once why don’t you ask Ma to help you? Once my exams are over, I will help you, I promise.”

Anjali stared at her sister, tears swimming in her eyes. “Ok, Didi, I’ll ask Ma. It’s just that she gets angry and shouts if I do even one small sum wrong. When she shouts I get so scared I do all the sums wrong. And then she gets even more angry with me. But you never shout at me. That’s why I like you and want you to help me with my homework....” Anjali’s voice trailed off as she ran out of words she could use to convince her Didi that she had to help her.

“Oh, Anjali,” Aayushi said, smiling and pulling her sister close to her. She pushed her books aside on her desk to make room for Anjali’s. “Come, let’s see what you have to do.”

“But what about your exams, Didi?” Anjali asked, staring wide-eyed at her sister.

“It’s fine. I’ll wake up early tomorrow morning and study. Now come, let’s finish your homework.”

The two girls sat at the desk. Aayushi patiently explained the Math sums to Anjali. Anjali listened to her sister with rapt attention. Just then, her gaze fell upon a glass jar filled with shells that stood on her sister’s desk.

“Ooh Didi! Those shells are so beautiful. Where did you get them?”

“My friend Preity got them for me. She went to Goa recently. Come now, pay attention to your work, Anjali.”

But Anjali was completely mesmerized by the shells. Dropping the pencil from her hand, she picked up the jar and stared wide-eyed at the shells. “I have never seen real shells before, Didi. I have just seen pictures of them,” she whispered. “Why can’t Ma and Papa take us to a place with a beach? Then we can see the ocean and get some shells from the beach. Do you want to go to the beach, Didi?”

Aayushi nodded absent-mindedly. She wanted Anjali to concentrate on her homework. If they finished early, she might just about find time to study before Ma called them for dinner.

“Come now, Anjali, let’s finish this Math so that we can do your English homework.”

“Didi,” Anjali said. “Can you give me these shells, please?”

“You can play with them whenever you like, Anjali,” Aayushi replied.

“No, Didi, I want them to be mine. I want to put them on my desk. Can you give them to me, please?”

Aayushi hesitated. She loved the shells and besides they were a gift from her best friend.

Anjali's eyes swam with tears. "I won't get angry if you don't give them to me, Didi," she said, staring earnestly at her sister. "We are not going to fight over silly things like shells like Ma and Papa fight with their brothers and sisters over money."

Aayushi laughed. "You're a naughty girl, Anjali," she scolded. "You know just the right things to say to get your way, don't you?"

Picking up the jar of shells, she placed it in Anjali's hands. "Here you go. They are yours now."

Anjali's eyes shone with joy. She flung her arms around Aayushi and hugged her tightly. "Oh, Didi, you are the best sister in the whole world. I love you, Didi." Then she hastily picked up the jar of shells and said, "I'll put them on my desk and come back quickly."

Anjali ran out of the room clutching the jar of shells tightly against her chest like a precious trophy. At the door, she turned and whispered to her sister, "You can play with the shells whenever you like. We'll always share things, won't we? Not like Ma and Papa?"

Smiling indulgently, Aayushi watched her sister running out of the room. At thirteen, she was old enough to realize that she spoiled Anjali hopelessly. Ma was always scolding her about how much she indulged her little sister. "You shouldn't pander to all Anjali's whims and fancies and give her everything she asks for," Ma had scolded Aayushi. "One day, when you're older, she'll ask you for something you won't be able to give her. What will you do then?"

"There's nothing I wouldn't do for Anjali," Aayushi had replied.

Pune, 2003

Aayushi hurriedly stirred the potato curry simmering on the stove. Lifting the lid, she checked if the chicken was ready. Rubbing her aching back, she turned and sat down with a sigh on the chair she had placed in the kitchen. Six months pregnant, Aayushi found it difficult to stand for long. She had put on a lot of weight and her feet were swollen.

“I feel so fat, tired and clumsy, Aakash,” she complained to her husband, when he walked into the kitchen.

“Just a few months more, Aayu and then the baby will be here. Have you finished cooking? We must leave for the station in ten minutes.”

Aayushi shook her head. “No Aakash, you carry on. I won’t finish in time and I don’t want Anjali to be kept waiting at the station.”

He nodded and left the room. Aayushi busied herself preparing the meal. She was making Anjali’s favorite dishes. She was so excited about her sister visiting her. This would be the first time Anjali would be staying with her after she had married Aakash. It had been almost a year since they had seen each other. Aayushi hadn’t been able to travel because of the baby and Anjali was busy with college life. But the two sisters were still close and spoke to each other almost every day on the phone. And when Anjali was finally done with her exams, she had immediately declared that she would visit Aayushi.

“I’ll stay with you and help you, Didi,” she had exclaimed over the mobile. “I want you to just sit back and relax while I take care of everything.”

The doorbell rang. They were here already! Hurriedly Anjali wiped her hands on her apron and smoothing down her hair, she walked awkwardly to the door. Opening it, she

stared at Anjali, her little sister, who was not so little any more. She had changed so much in just a year. Gone was the shy and awkward teenager. In her place stood a tall and slim girl with sleek glossy hair and makeup on her face. Aayushi blinked in surprise. She hardly recognized her sister.

Anjali stepped inside and dropping her bag to the floor, she enveloped Aayushi in a tight hug. “Oh Didi, didi, didi, it’s so good to see you,” she said.

Aayushi smiled with relief. Although Anjali looked different, inside she was still the same girl, her little sister whom she adored. They had been there for each other through all the highs and lows of childhood and now as adults, they were confidants and best friends. It was true that both of them looked different, but nothing had changed.

Anjali stepped back and stared at Aayushi. “You’ve put on too much weight, Didi,” she said, looking critically at Aayushi.

Aayushi smiled tiredly at her sister. “It’s what people do when they get pregnant, Anjali,” she said.

“Girls, if you are done, can I enter the house please,” Aakash exclaimed impatiently.

The two girls realized that they had been blocking the doorway. They hurriedly stepped aside and made way for Aakash to enter. He walked into the house carrying Anjali’s bags.

“Your sister carries an awful lot of luggage for a short stay,” he grumbled, as he took the bags to the guest room.

Anjali stared after the retreating back of her brother-in-law. “He’s still as handsome as he was when you married him a year ago, Didi,” she whispered, clasping Aayushi’s hand in

hers. Aayushi smiled fondly at Anjali. She was still such a child, underneath the sleek blow-dried hair and makeup.

“Well, he didn’t get pregnant, did he? He’s bound to still look handsome.” she replied.

The two girls burst into gales of laughter. “Imagine how he would look with a big, fat pregnant tummy,” Anjali said, giggling as she pictured her brother-in-law strutting about the room with a big tummy.

Aakash walked into the room just then. “What’s the joke?” he asked, raising his eyebrows quizzically.

“Nothing,” Anjali said, stifling her laughter.

“Come, let’s eat,” Aayushi said. “Dinner’s ready. There’s potato curry and chicken.”

“All my favorites! Oh, Didi, you are the bestest!” Anjali said, enveloping her sister in a huge hug.

The two girls walked into the kitchen arm in arm. Anjali grabbed a carrot from the ones lying on the kitchen counter and nibbled on it while Aayushi busied herself warming the food. She handed the dishes to her sister who carried them out to the dining table. Aakash stood at the door, observing the two women.

“Can I help?” he asked. Aayushi glanced at him, realizing he felt left out. She signaled an apology with her eyes, as she motioned him into the kitchen. Aakash always helped her warm the food, lay the table and clear it up afterwards. It was their time together. While eating, Aayushi would pour over the TV schedule and they would take turns to pick a movie, which they watched after dinner, snuggling together among the cushions on the comfortable velvet couch placed before the television. When the movie finished, the two of them made their way to the bedroom together. Aayushi loved the small, simple routines that

made up her married life. She adored Aakash and was utterly content in her marriage. He was everything she had ever wanted in a husband – jovial and happy-go-lucky with a ready smile on his face. Having grown up in the somber atmosphere that Ma and Papa created at home in her childhood years, she had promised herself she would marry a man who would make her laugh. And she had gone ahead and done just that.

Later when the three of them were eating their meal, Aakash waited for Aayushi to bring out the TV schedule. She realized that in all the excitement of preparing for Anjali's visit, she had forgotten to place it on the table, as she usually did.

"I'll get it, Didi," Anjali exclaimed, pushing back her chair and rising. "Just tell me where it is."

"It's in the newspaper rack, Anjali."

"Got it!" Anjali exclaimed returning to the table with the schedule in her hands. Aayushi stretched out her hand for it, but Anjali was already pouring over the schedule. "This is fun," she chattered. "Do you guys do this every evening? Dinner at home is so boring! Pin drop silence while Papa chews on his food thoughtfully and Ma silently serves us what she's made."

"Don't be rude about our parents, Anjali," Aayushi said, gently rebuking her sister. But she couldn't help smiling at the excitement she saw in Anjali's eyes as she poured over the schedule. "Go on then, pick a movie."

She sat back with an amused smile, as she heard Anjali suggesting possible names of movies, while Aakash mulled over each one and rejected it.

"Let's watch Rain Man," Anjali and Aakash exclaimed together.

“Hurry, it will start in just five minutes. Come Aakash. I don’t want to miss the beginning.”

“Wait...I need to help Aayu clear the table...” he said.

“No, go ahead Aakash,” Aayushi said. She was happy to see her sister and husband getting along so well together. This had been one of her biggest fears when she married Aakash. What if Aakash didn’t take to Anjali or found her troublesome? She adored these two people most in the world and more than anything else, she wanted them to get along with each other. She had been a bit apprehensive about having Anjali come and stay with them. What if Aakash found her pesky or intrusive? But luckily, the two of them seemed to be getting along like a house on fire.

During the film, Aayushi felt her eyes closing. It had been a long day and she was tired. Yawning, she mumbled an apology and rose from the couch. “Sorry but I’m going to bed,” she said.

Aakash rose to follow her to the room.

Oh, stay for a bit Aakash,” Anjali said. “The movie should finish in about half hour I think.”

Aakash hesitated.

“Stay Aakash,” Aayushi said, as she walked to the bedroom. “You can tell me what happens tomorrow.”

The next morning, Aayushi rose early, as she usually did.

“Aakash, wake up!” she said, shaking him gently.

“Ummm...let me sleep, baby.”

“But aren’t you coming for our walk?” she asked in surprise.

“No,” he mumbled. “Feeling lazy sweetie. I’ll skip the walk today but you go ahead. I don’t want you to miss it. It’ll do you good.”

An hour later, when Aayushi returned home, she found Aakash and Anjali in the kitchen cooking breakfast.

“Good morning, Didi,” Anjali called out. “See we have breakfast ready for you. You just sit at the table and enjoy it.”

Aayushi sat at the table glancing at the newspaper lying there. “What shall we do today, Anjali?” she asked. “Would you like to go shopping? Then we can have lunch at a new restaurant, ‘Spring Flowers’, that opened last week. It has some fabulous food, I have heard.”

After a brief pause, Anjali said, “Didi, I’m so sorry, I completely forgot to tell you yesterday. I’m going out this morning and will be back only by five or so.”

Aayushi raised her eyebrows in surprise. “Where are you going, Anjali?”

“Oh, out with some friends,” Anjali said airily, as she walked into the dining room with a plate of steaming *idlis* in her hand.

“Friends? But you don’t know anyone in Pune, Anjali.” Aayushi said, puzzled.

“Oh, they are just a bunch of people I met on the train while coming here. I became quite friendly with them and we decided to meet up today.”

“But Anjali, you hardly know these people. You know nothing about them. How can you go out and spend a whole day with them? It isn’t safe.”

“Oh, Di, don’t play the big sister with me, please. I am all grown-up now, see,” Anjali said, as she pirouetted in front of her sister.

Aayushi smiled but still she hesitated. After all, Anjali was her responsibility while she was staying with her.

“I am not sure...”

Aakash walked into the room just then.

“What’s up?” he asked.

“Anjali wants to go out with some people she’s just met. I’m not sure if she should or if it’s even safe for her to do so.”

Aakash frowned and shook his head. “No, I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Please Di, Aakash, please please please,” Anjali pleaded, staring at the two of them earnestly. “Ma and Papa hardly allow me to go anywhere or have any fun. Please let me go. They are nice people from good families, I promise. Nothing will happen. Please trust me.”

Aayushi hesitated and then she gave in to the mute appeal in Anjali’s eyes. She knew exactly how Ma and Papa could be and how stifled her little sister probably felt at home.

“All right, Anjali,” she said.

Smiling, Anjali waltzed out of the room to dress.

“You are far too indulgent with her,” Aakash grumbled, as he sat at the table.

“I know,” Aayushi sighed. “But it’s hard for me to say no to her.”

“Well, I need to be off early today, Aayu,” Aakash said apologetically, placing his hand over his wife’s. “What do

you plan on doing with yourself now that Anjali isn't here?"

"Oh, I'm not sure," Aayushi grumbled. "I'll probably stay at home and watch television, I guess."

"Why don't you start working on your novel, Aayu? You've always been talking about writing it. Why don't you give it a go?"

"I'm not sure Aakash. I keep thinking I'll start but something seems to be holding me back. The words just won't flow. Maybe I'll start today like you said and take it from there."

"Right then, I'll be off," Aakash said, adjusting his tie and bending to give Aayushi a hug.

Aayushi glanced up in surprise and realized that Aakash was already dressed for work.

"So early?" she asked.

"Yes, Aayu, I have an early morning meeting with some clients. But I'll try to get home early and maybe we can go out somewhere. I think the break will do you good."

Aayushi nodded absent-mindedly, fiddling with the *idlis* on her plate. In a few seconds, the house was empty and she was left staring at the food on the table. She cleared the table, left the dishes to soak in the sink and then flopped down on the couch tiredly.

Time seemed to be whizzing by in a blur of nothingness, Aayushi thought, a few days later. She felt abandoned, neglected, and utterly alone. Aakash was exceptionally busy at work and even when he was home, he was silent and withdrawn. He usually pulled out his laptop and continued working. When she had reproached him that he

was far too busy for her liking, he had hugged her absentmindedly and said the project he was working on would soon wrap up, after which, his schedule would be back to normal. At times, she wondered if he minded the fact that Anjali was staying with them. Was this why he was away from home so much? She had openly questioned him about it, but he had stared at her in surprise. He had assured her that it was work that was keeping him busy and he certainly didn't mind Anjali staying with them.

As for Anjali, she was hardly at home. She waltzed in and out of the house, spending most of her time with the new friends she had made. But what worried Aayushi even more, was the fact that Anjali had changed. She no longer confided in her. When Aayushi asked questions about her friends or asked her to invite them home so that she could meet them, Anjali was strangely reticent. She refused to speak about her friends and downright refused to invite them home. This was very unlike the Anjali of old, who always shared every single detail of her life with her. When they were children, Anjali would spend the bus ride home describing every minute detail of her day to her sister. And the pattern had continued even after Aayushi had married and moved to Pune and Anjali had started college. She still called her sister every single day as soon as she got home from college. Aayushi knew all about Anjali's college life. She knew about her best friends, Maya and Yohan. She knew about the annoying teachers who gave far too many assignments and the boring ones who couldn't explain a thing. She even knew about Anjali's little escapades – the time when she had cut classes to watch *Spiderman* and the other time when she had stayed at Maya's place because she had wanted to attend a late-night party, which her parents would never have allowed.

And now Aayushi was concerned about Anjali's secrecy because it was so unlike her sister. Aayushi's big-sister antenna was up and sending out warning signals. Anjali was hiding something from her, she was quite sure of it. But what could it possibly be? Was she moving around with an unsavory crowd whom Aayushi wouldn't approve of? Was that why Anjali refused to speak about her friends? Was she involved with someone? But if that were the case, she would have told her about it. Unless she was involved with someone completely unsuitable. Aayushi was worried about Anjali. Often, she thought of having a frank discussion with her. But Anjali was so cool and aloof, she found it hard to do so. The words stuck in her throat when she saw the steely, almost flint-like hardness in Anjali's normally gentle, doe-like eyes. Aayushi had always been able to read her sister's eyes. She just had to glance down into Anjali's melting brown eyes and she knew exactly what her little sister was thinking or what she wanted. But now, Anjali's eyes were masked by a sheen of cool indifference, which Aayushi found quite hurtful.

One Monday morning, Aayushi was sitting at the dining table reading the newspaper. Anjali walked in from her bedroom. Aayushi glanced up from her newspaper. "Going out?" she asked, although she knew it was a silly question. Anjali was all dressed up – of course she was going out. Anjali nodded. "I'm a bit hungry, Di," she said, dropping her bag and mobile phone on the table.

Aayushi rose. "I'll get you some breakfast," she said, eagerly, happy to spend some time with her sister.

Anjali shook her head. "No, don't bother. No time for that. I'll just grab some fruit from the fridge. She opened the fridge, grabbed an apple and a pear from the fruit bowl and then picking up her bag, she left, calling goodbye to Aayushi.

Aayushi sighed and returned to her newspaper. Solitude settled over her like a heavy cloak enveloping her in a deafening silence she found almost hard to bear at times. Aakash had left early to work as usual, mumbling an apology and promising he would soon be done with his project. The sudden beeping of a mobile startled Aayushi. Her own mobile was in the bedroom, charging. She looked up from her newspaper and saw that Anjali had forgotten her mobile on the table. Aayushi stared at the mobile. Here, at last, was her chance to find out what Anjali was up to. Surely her phone would have some evidence that would offer her a clue to what her little sister was up to. She knew it was wrong to intrude on Anjali's privacy. But concern for her sister overrode her normally high ethical standards. Rising from her chair, she reached out and picked up the mobile.

The words of the text message swam before her eyes and she dropped the mobile from her hands. It fell to the table with a clatter. Aayushi felt the room swimming before her eyes and she clutched the chair to stop herself from falling. She couldn't possibly have read that message correctly, she thought. It was surreal, unbelievable. It couldn't possibly be true. She must have been mistaken. Sitting down on the chair, she picked up the mobile and glanced at it again. There was no mistake. The message was from Aakash, her husband Aakash! And the contents were utterly disgusting. A shudder of revulsion ran through her as she read Aakash's depraved message about how he would make love to Anjali today, the things they would do in bed, and how he was eagerly waiting for her in their room.

Aayushi rose from the chair and stumbled out of the house holding the mobile in her hands, as if by leaving the house she could, in some way, escape the brutal reality of her sister's betrayal. She stood on the pavement while the

traffic whizzed past. She was surrounded by the sounds of cars honking and people talking to each other as they walked past her on the busy pavement. But the sounds slowly receded into a distance. A dull roaring filled Aayushi's ears as she stood in the midst of the bustling street. She was enveloped in an unnatural silence that dug its roots deep into her, immersing her in a chasm of grief that seemed almost impossible in its proportions. She walked, aimlessly, purposelessly, not heeding the strange glances she received from people around her. "Miss, you are bleeding," a stranger told her, concern lacing her voice. "Perhaps you didn't realize. Would you like me to take you somewhere?" But Aayushi shook her head, her eyes welling up as she realized that she was probably losing her baby. But it didn't matter, nothing mattered. And so she walked on. The hours passed and the sky lost its color as it was enveloped in the gray hues of dusk. The city settled into shadowy silhouettes against the night sky. She glanced into a shop window and was startled when she saw her reflection. Stopping, she stared at herself. Fat, bedraggled, with frizzy hair. She didn't remember the last time she had washed her hair or been to the salon. She had been so wrapped up in her pregnancy and the safe little cocoon of Aakash's love, which she had so artlessly taken for granted, that she had not paid any attention to her appearance in the last few months. A picture rose in her mind of Anjali, slim, sleek and beautiful. It hadn't been a level playing field, she thought bitterly. Except she had been completely oblivious to the fact that a game was being played and she was one of the players. She envisioned Anjali and Aakash wrapped in each other's arms and an almost impossible kind of sorrow overwhelmed her. The phone in her hand rang stridently just then, again and again, till finally, in a fit of rage, she flung it into a trash can.

It was close to midnight, when, overcome by exhaustion, she made her way home. They were waiting for her there, her sister and her husband, who was now her sister's lover. Bitter bile rose in her throat when she saw the two of them waiting on the velvet couch, anxiety writ large on their faces.

"Didi," Anjali said, hesitatingly.

"Don't call me that! Don't you ever call me that again!" she said bitterly.

"Aayu, you are bleeding...the child! Let's go to a doctor immediately!" Aakash exclaimed.

"No! It's good that we lost the child. You have ruined my life, Aakash. Isn't that enough damage? Or do you want to ruin the child's life too?"

"But, Didi! We didn't mean to hurt you. It's just that we fell in love. We resisted but eventually, this thing we felt for each other was bigger than us. We want to get married. Oh Didi, can't you somehow find it in your heart to be happy for me? I know I'm asking for too much when I ask you to give me your husband, but marrying Aakash is the only thing in the world that can make me happy."

"Anjali, stop! What are you saying?" Aakash said harshly. "I never promised to marry you. Oh, what have I done? Believe me Ayu, this thing with Anjali was just a temporary madness. It doesn't mean anything. I don't know what came over me. It's just that she was so young and adoring. I fell for her charm but I never meant it to go so far. Oh, you have to believe me."

The two women stared at Aakash. If it was possible to love and loathe a person in equal measure at the same time, then the two sisters achieved it in that moment. It was Ayu who broke the spell.

“I don’t quite know what to believe anymore,” she said, in a voice that was flat and tinged with exhaustion.

Goa, 2007

The buzzing of the alarm woke Aayushi. She got out of bed. Walking to the window, she peered outside. At six, it was still dark, although the birds had already started chirping to herald the arrival of a new day.

Aayushi fixed her customary cup of tea and then wandered out of her little house to the sit-out facing her garden where she usually read while sipping her tea. She glanced down at her mobile lying on the table beside her mug of tea. Today was 13th September. Her divorce had come through on this very day four years ago. With a wry smile, she sipped her tea and allowed herself a moment to reflect on her erstwhile husband.

Aayushi recalled the initial months after the divorce, when she had oscillated between grief and anger. Aakash had called quite often, even after the divorce. He said he still loved her and begged her to return to him. Of course, she had been tempted to give in. But each time she thought of doing so, a picture rose in her mind of Aakash and Anjali wrapped in each other’s arms. She knew that although she still loved Aakash, she could never live with him again.

She missed Aakash terribly in the initial months after the divorce. She missed his laughter and the way he lit up a room with his presence when he entered it. She missed the way he snuggled up close to her in bed, curling his feet around hers. She missed the daily routine of life with him. Loss and grief were her constant companions, dogging her heels in those days. She was consumed by an aching loneliness and a feeling that she had been completely abandoned.

That's when Aayushi took to writing. She wrote her first novel in three months flat in a torrential creative storm. She barely ate or slept in those months. Instead, she spent the entire day and the better part of the night at her laptop working on her novel. Writing offered her a release from the all-consuming fury that choked her. And from the creative almost frenzied outpouring of her rage, grief and loss, a terrible beauty was born in the form of her first novel. Publishers had snapped up her work and the novel had soared on the popularity charts to become a bestseller. She had published two other novels since then. Both had also been bestsellers and her readers were clamoring for more.

Today Aayushi is content with life. She divides her time between her writing and running an NGO for battered women and both satisfy her completely in ways she believes a relationship with a man never could. Time certainly doesn't heal all wounds. But the raw all-consuming grief has finally given way to a dull, barely perceptible ache. When she divorced Aakash four years ago, Aayushi had ruthlessly cut him out of her day-to-day life. Now she finds that, with time, he is fading from her memory as well. It never ceases to amaze her that any person, no matter how loved he may be, can also be eventually forgotten.

Then Aayushi's thoughts settle on Anjali and she sighs. It has been five years since she has seen or spoken to Anjali. After the terrible day when Aayushi had found out about Anjali's affair with Aakash, Anjali had returned to Hyderabad. Aayushi had ruthlessly cut all contact with her sister. Her parents had been completely bewildered by Anjali's sudden return. When they heard about Aayushi's impending divorce, they had been horrified. Girls from decent families didn't divorce their husbands, they had told

Aayushi sternly. If she persisted in taking this step, they would cut all ties with her and have nothing more to do with her. Aayushi had refused to change her mind and her parents had not spoken to her since her divorce.

Anjali had called often, begging her Didi to forgive her. But Aayushi hadn't been able to find it in her heart to forgive her sister. Eventually the calls had stopped...the ringing of the doorbell startled Aayushi out of her reverie. Picking up her mug of tea, she made her to the door to open it. She found Anjali standing there. Her sister looked painfully thin and there were large hollow circles under her eyes. Anjali's once beautiful, glossy, long hair, which she had so prided herself on, was cut short. Horrified, Aayushi saw several gray streaks in her sister's now coarse cropped hair. What on earth had happened to Anjali?

"Oh Didi," Anjali whispered, her eyes welling with tears. "I've made a mess of things. Help me, Di."

Aayushi stared wide-eyed at her sister. Anjali looked like a waif, completely lost and forlorn. A wave of immense love washed over Aayushi, dissolving the hard knot of resentment and anger she had nurtured for five long years at her sister's betrayal. In that moment, she realized that she still loved Anjali. And she would always love her. It didn't matter what Anjali had done. Without a word, she pulled her sister into her house and enveloped her in a tight hug.

"I'm sorry Di," Anjali sobbed, clinging to Aayushi. "I ruined your life. Can you ever forgive me?"

"Hush," Aayushi said, stroking Anjali's hair as she attempted to calm her sister down. "We won't speak of that anymore. It's done and over with – a closed chapter in our lives. But what has happened to you, Anjali?"

Aayushi listened horrified as Anjali poured forth a sordid tale of drug and alcohol abuse. “I want to stop, Di,” Anjali sobbed. “But I am not strong enough to do it on my own. Will you help me?”

Aayushi nodded.

Goa, 2008

“Anjali, wake up!” Aayushi shook her sister awake. “I’m going to the beach for a run. Are you coming?”

“You carry on Di,” Anjali mumbled, burrowing her face in her pillow. “I’ll join you in five minutes or so.”

“When are you going to start exercising, Anjali?” Aayushi grumbled, as she walked out of the room. But she didn’t push her sister. The rehab had taken its toll on Anjali and the doctors had instructed Aayushi to let Anjali set the pace on how she wanted to pick up the threads of her life again.

Fifteen minutes later, Aayushi was running along the beach when she heard a familiar voice calling, “Di, wait for me.”

Turning, Aayushi saw Anjali jogging towards her. She smiled. It was good to see her sister out in the fresh air. Anjali was clutching something in her hand, as she jogged towards her sister. Aayushi wondered what it could possibly be. When Anjali drew closer, she saw that her sister was holding a glass jar of shells.

“Di, do you remember this?” Anjali said, as she drew closer to her sister.

Anjali smiled and nodded. “I can’t believe you still have that!”

“Here Di, I want you to have it.” Anjali thrust out the jar towards Aayushi.

Aayushi hesitated for a brief moment and then took the jar from Anjali. “I don’t understand. Why are you giving me this, Anjali?”

“Di, the shells, Aakash, so many things...I have just taken and taken from you all these years. Oh, Di, I was a selfish, spoiled child and I grew into a selfish adult. But I don’t want to be that person any more.”

“Oh Anjali,” Aayushi smiled, enveloping her sister in a tight hug. Then holding Anjali’s hand, she led her towards the sea. The two sisters kicked off their shoes, rolled up their tracks and walked into the cool waters. Aayushi took the glass jar and upended it till all the shells tumbled into the sea.

“Di, what are you doing?” Anjali said, attempting to grab the jar from Aayushi’s outstretched hands. But it was too late. The shells had already fallen into the water and were swept away by the waves.

“Hush Anjali,” Aayushi whispered soothingly. “Come with me.” Holding the jar in one hand and taking her sister’s hand, Aayushi made her way back to the beach. Bending, she picked a single, pale pink, tiny shell from the sand and dropped it into the jar. Giggling, Anjali picked another shell and dropped it into the jar with a tiny chink. The two women walked along the beach, clutching the jar between them, slowly filling it with shells.

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Meenakshi Jauhari Chawla

House of Soul

Half a century ago, I began life in a tiny room situated in the heart of this house. This is my grandfather's home. Far from the city where I now live. Far from a lot of the world. Today that room has only rusted boxes that have not been touched for decades by anything more substantial than dust and the heavy breath of monsoon. I was born in a moment of anguish, and the little room, its rough walls, lent a helping hand. The cool floor touched my mother's brow, comforted her on that humid September day in an era when India and Pakistan were getting into a war in the Indian subcontinent, and Beatles were releasing another hit album a long way off.

The room is now an old hunchback. The roof-beams cave in at the center, the walls hold it up. I pass through the low doorway. It groans at my footfall. The wrought iron chain in the middle of the rough-hewn wood is now stiff and rusted. It is an old faithful; it has secured the door, distracted weeping babies, and is a silent relic of an era that sank in my grandfather's grave.

"Dadi, Dadi, I want jalebis... give me jalebis." The little girl danced before her harried grandma, and clung to the old woman's crumpled housework sari.

"Wait!" Dadi scolded, "Wait just for an hour, little one! Soon, Baba will be back from his morning walk. Then he will bring jalebis for all the children."

Baba, our grandfather, was a schoolteacher, and during vacation when his grandchildren came visiting, he was a frequent visitor at the corner sweet shop. An old-world

disciplinarian, he was feared, and I'm sure, even secretly avoided in the marketplace by his students. To teach English to small-town schoolchildren in a tiny hamlet in North India must not have been easy, but my grandfather loved his job. Hanging participles, past perfect tenses and Shakespeare's sonnets – all were granted their rightful share of attention or jaw-dropping awe in his classes. He expected fervent devotion from his students, for their English textbooks and his instructions on how to write it correctly. Sadly, most students did not measure up to his expectations, but that did not deter him from unfolding before them the wonders of the metaphor and oxymoron. That was grandpa for other children.

For us, he was our Baba, indulgent grandfather. I remember him in pieces today. His trousers, broad and flapping about his black shoes as he walked briskly from one task to the next; his thick glasses that he removed frequently to clean and put back on his nose, and that grew thicker with age; his soft Urdu syllables as he conversed with his friends, students and visitors and his laughter. His laugh was distinctive – a thoughtful chuckle, almost, that hesitated at first, then gained momentum and filled his throat, pushing his head up and backwards in sheer lighthearted articulation. Like the stories he told his class, his laughter had a beginning, middle and end.

It was a time we, his grandchildren, loved jalebis, cylindrical spirals dipped in warm sugar syrup. They came fresh from the sweet shop, crunchy to begin with, and then, as you bit into them, the golden syrup within the tubules invaded all corners of your mouth and spread a glow within you that erupted into a sticky smile and a desire to have more.

All of us, eight or nine cousins, could devour jalebis by the score, any time of the day or night. Baba, indulgent and

perhaps mindful that these were days on the run, was happy to keep up a steady supply, interspersed with rabri – fragrant thickened milk plumped with raisins, pistachios, cashews and the essence of addiction. It was food for the gods.

The courtyard floor has a pattern that scratches a memory. I have not forgotten it. Age has not marked its black stone even though the large white circular pattern has faded and completely disappeared in parts. But its life-force is spent. This daalaan (courtyard) had a huge marble-topped table that held cartons of daseri mangoes. I cannot remember many occasions when we actually ate on it. During our visits, it was inevitably crammed with things that were coming in or going out of the house. Amidst its various fragrant passages, it also served as an emperor's throne from where a playfully cruel emperor threw errant courtiers and giggly prisoners to their death into the black dungeon below where deadly alligators crawled, always hungry and searching for prey. It was infinitely more adventurous to be the alligator than the wildly ecstatic emperor who needed to do a lot of shouting and waving for impact. The alligators could do a belly-crawl or twist sinewy child-bodies into the most creative of reptilian shapes, or emit fearful sounds aimed at striking terror in the hearts of one and all. It was a time of hope, endless possibilities.

In a few years' time we outgrew the horrible game. After that, when the (older and civilized) cousins met, we swapped stories. The jalebis still came, and we still converged at the marble table, still crammed with stuff and still rarely used to eat meals.

Today the daalaan is dry and the alligators have moved to the natural park - I suppose. The table is still there and has developed a wide crack in the center. My eyes wander to the wooden legs, sturdy still. How many times these

wooden legs supported excited limbs that refused to stop moving, shaking, beating, thumping and rearing. The air still shakes with the faded echoes of remembered laughter, voices that fell silent, and went away.

Revisiting a much-loved home required preparation on my part. I was afraid I would see it in a different light. I was afraid I would find it bereft. I was afraid I would find it saturated with memory.

I found my old home a little of all of these. It was different. But somehow, through the grime of the years, it remembered me. The narrow lane from the main street to the house that we used to traverse in a tonga, relived old footfalls.

I had insisted upon a tonga at the station today.

“Bari bi, the tongas have all gone. There are only taxis and autos now.” I was told by an amused group of auto drivers.

“Where have they gone? Don’t the tonga-wallahs need to eat?” I asked.

Just then a tonga came miraculously by. The ride in the open horse-drawn carriage to the clipped rhythm of horses’ hoofs was a ride in the sky – fresh morning breeze, clean line of eucalyptus trees and a keen hunger. Suddenly there I was...

The house stands before me, gaunt and solemn, silent. Its windows beckon.

I remember a long ago evening. The sun had dipped and an indigo sheen lingered behind the trees, uncertain. I was about fifteen and had gone to visit my grandparents for only a day. A deep stillness stretched through the house. Even on the terrace where I stood and watched a kite impale itself on a tree, I felt the silence rising towards me. The indigo pallor persisted. A sick man refusing to let go. I

could see the entire lane below, from end to end. It emptied suddenly. Except for the clamorous milkman whose milk tins did all the talking. And abruptly, the dark flew in. Misshapen shadows appeared in unexpected places as if the ghouls of the night had emerged all at once at an invisible signal. I turned on the lone bulb and its yellow light tried to push back the shadows, creating new ones.

When I came downstairs, my grandparents were sitting on their cot, deep in prayer. It was a routine I was familiar with. They did their sandhya (evening prayer) at this hour and they always did it together, sitting side by side. Later after my Dadi died, to see my Baba sitting down at his sandhya by himself, was a poignant sight. He always seemed sad then. But right now, they both sat peacefully side by side, eyes shut, Baba slouched forward and Dadi, shorter but erect. I heard their prayer, part song, part recitation. A reassuring murmur restored the dark to its rightful dimension. As I gazed at them from a distance, they appeared old, lonely. The home where they had raised five children and many more grandchildren had an alien hue that evening. The children had grown up and left. The grandchildren came back, but like restless sparrows, they always flew off, all too soon. The house had grown old. Like old people, it had its moods. I suppose it disliked being empty. Perhaps my presence added to its surliness as it remembered other visits, noisier visits.

After that visit Dadi died. I did not visit the house for a long time. There was no need to; Baba stayed with his sons in various parts of the world, in turns, and we, his grandchildren, became busy with our lives. The house stood bereft.

This house has a soul. Every house has a soul. The soul of a house is the sum total of all the lives that passed through it; the dreams that lit up its night-time walls. The soul of a

house is its accumulation of unseen cobwebs of memories. Mostly, it remains silent but once in a long while, somebody lucky is able to touch the soul of a house.

I took the train back to Delhi overwhelmed by the passage of things, time. Passing from one day to the next, we rarely touch passages. But one trip to a childhood home, passing through rooms that cradled a childhood, and I see the universe passing. A distant song is floating in the afternoon breeze and everything around is unfamiliar, irrelevant. As the train approaches the outskirts of the city, the air stings me.



Meenakshi Jauhari Chawla trained as a computer engineer but works now for an independent publishing house in New Delhi. Her fiction has been published in *The Little Magazine* and *Sahitya Akademi's* journal, *Indian Literature*. Her poems were part of a poetry volume entitled *I, Me, Myself* (Unisun, Bangalore, 2010) and the *The Poetry Society (India) Journal* (2010).

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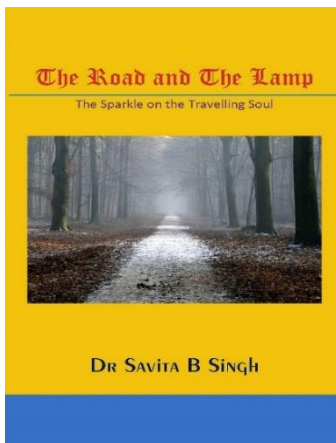


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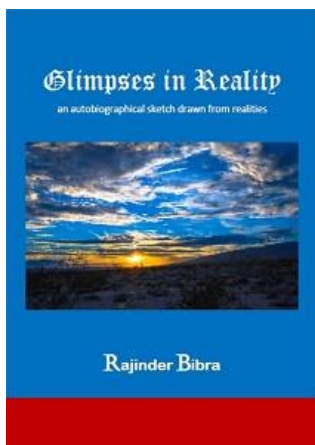
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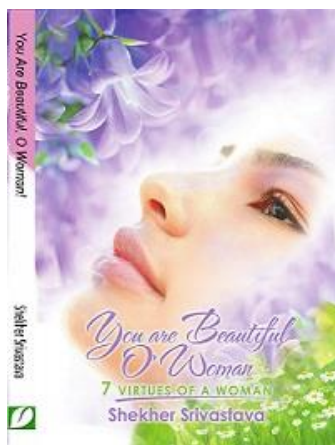
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Arts

Pictures by Rony Nair







Rony Nair is a poet, photographer and a part time columnist for several national dailies. His poetry, photography and writings have been featured and anthologized extensively.

Several of his works have appeared in various journals including the Chiron Review, Kitaab, The Indian Express, Coldnoon, YGDRASIL journal, Mindless Muse, Yellow Chair Review, Indian Review, Alephi, New Asian Writing (NAW), Semaphore, The Economic Times, 1947, The Foliate Oak Magazine, Open Road Magazine, Tipton Review, Antarctica Journal, North East Review, Guerilla Wire, and Modern Literature, among numerous others.

His poetry has often been critiqued by fictional luminaries such as Shashi Tharoor, Sumana Roy and others. Rony's poem *Obamaclipse* (2018) was longlisted by Writers Resist for the Pushcart.

Poems

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Dr Dalip Khetarpal

Futile Queries and Epical Shrieks of Few Anguished Souls

This fractured age
Has generated a society, improvised
Wherein manipulations are legitimate rights,
Wherein luck or success depends not on caliber
But on whims, on the choice of boss
Whose birthright privilege has often been
To shape your fortune,
Wherein every feeling and thinking is fake,
Wherein everyone has to forfeit his honesty and integrity
Simply for **acceptance**,
Wherein stupidity is glorified over intelligence,
Again, simply for **acceptance**,
Where dishonesty is glorified over integrity,
Simply, still again, for **acceptance**.

In this cyber age
Beauty is worshipped over morals,
Selfishness over selflessness
Weakness over strength
Cruelty over kindness

Revenge over forgiveness

Demerits over merits

Dishonor over honor.

The false so, win

And the true, lose.

Surely, this is a cybernetics, capitalist,

industrialized-robotized century,

The purest century of impure face-book,

Instagram and cybernetics,

Of cyber-space, cybersquatting and cyber-sex of cyborgs,

Wherein everything, devoid of spirit, is fake and mechanized,

Sans life and warmth

Depriving also the life and warmth

Of ecology, of nature.

A robotic culture clones

Can't spend a day, an hour or even a minute,

Sans apps on their smart-phone,

But can comfortably and gleefully spend their whole life

Witnessing the poor, the sick, the wretched

And the deprived, wilting.

Media also teaches us not

To follow the unpopular

That is worthy, virtuous and meaningful,

But the evil demonic popular
Through trivial and worthless ads.
Latest modern concept opines: 'We need to be wealthy,'
So, our system also teaches
How wealth power and fame are essential,
How they determine one's success,
How character is defined and refined by
One's material position,
How even one's religiosity is measured by
One's socio-financial status.

But does acquiring and having all such illusive best
Makes one really the best?
Can the best of Satanic qualities imbibed
Makes one the best?

Success is ironically attained by who one really knows,
Not by what he really knows.
The cursed majority suffers, is exploited,
The unfairly blessed- selected few, enjoy cakes and ale
Though awash with lust, greed, malice, spite
And loaded with deep loathing,
While the languishing commoners slave over
Their menial jobs
And groan in anguish.

Day in and day out, we notice all these physically
But we remain unaffected, feel it not a whit
'cause the sensitivity of our sensibilities
Has become blunt, hardened,
Rather dead.

Compassion and pity
Affects not our insensate defunct psyche.
Conditioned to seeing all this
We're not capable of seeing anything good
Seeing better is a remote dream.
Passionately luxuriating and wallowing in lies,
We have become terribly accomplished liars.

Science makes us robotic culture clones,
Schools only teach us how to mug up the syllabus,
To inhale and exhale a fixed specific matter
But seldom how to think freely and analyze.
They only teach us how to think
Of conforming to societal norms, to authority;
But seldom teach us how to react freely,
How to question the rod-wielding or gut-wrenching
authority,
How to fight the evils of our own culture and conventions.
They rather impel us to yield to authority
And blindly follow the set conventions---

----defiance so kills as conformity survives us.

Religions want us never to question
But to blindly believe in it
For they know that faith is unquestionable,
Forgetting that faith is something personal too.
Religion, race, ethnicity and all human beliefs
Are but ineffable human constructs,
So why blindly follow them.
No human construct, howsoever good and appealing,
Should ever overpower our sense and sensibilities,
Snatch our freedom of thought,
And prevent us from thinking freely.

Most religious men are corrupt to trick us
Still, we worship them, shamefully, knowingly.
Why should it be?
Why should the corrupt be fed, eulogized and worshipped
And empty and theatrical rhetoric and rants
Of fake saints and leaders earn
Applause and kudos
When we witness the languishing poor
Ruthlessly torn by hunger,
Poverty and disease?
Why should all means of comfort and luxury,

Special foods, drinks, electronic gadgets, pop culture
Be more important than environmental pollution,
Animal extinction, starving sick children, poverty and
hunger?

Why should we impart such a bright sheen
To the mean and unclean?
Should we allow their undeserved celebrity status
To intrude on our sensitive conscience and consciousness?

We kill animals because they're weaker than us,
Because we can control them.
We kill them solely to gratify our palate----
-----ruthlessly prioritizing taste over innocent lives.
Why then do we advocate the cause of animals,
When we kill and eat them?
When we can't love humans, how can we love animals!
When living by killing even humans is our forte,
How can animals be spared!
We often show our loyalty and love to animals
Only when we have no alternative, no being
To vent and shower our love on,
Or, when they serve our needs
Or offer some gain.
Why should our love emanate from selfishness

When it is something natural and compellingly needs a vent!

Why then should we demand sincerity and trust

From these speechless innocent species

When we know that our return is nothing, but betrayal?

Why should we be also called *mankind*

When we're most *unkind*?

As an intelligent, enlightened species of this planet

We're surely mean, cruel and selfish.

Sustainable mushrooming endless growth of all ills

On this finite planet ironically, has led to the collapse

Of this civilization, for virtues and eternal values

Have become unsustainable.

This most advanced enlightening ultra modern century

Wherein even the most fatal problem has a solution

Why should there be famine, poverty, hunger, disease, war

And mental illnesses varied?

Why then do we advocate peace, progress and prosperity

When we generate wars, deaths and chaos?

Why should we follow such a system

That promotes all these,

That makes the unclean rich,

And the clean poor?

When one per cent of the world's population

Owens 40% of all the wealth this pitiable planet has,
Can we say this world is fair,
Just, balanced and healthy?
It's all so gnawing...
These are the symptoms of an ailing system.
This fractured century
Needs to be repaired, revived,
It's the ripest time to act.
Should we so now not awaken and dredge up the truth,
The sense of fair play and justice that lies dormant
In our sub-conscious and unconscious mind?

Let this world remain a stage,
Let all be actors,
Let the producer-director of the play
Be mute and unconcerned,
The show should instantly stop
To save the world
From its cataclysmic end.

If my vision needs revision,
If my perception is wrong,
I must clean my dirty glasses
And see all this again with cleaner glasses
And give a cleaner view

Which may again not be true,
'cause it's unwise to generalize personal perception,
Though it is right.

Note: I was so inspired by the theme of a poem of Sara Rozit (a 20- year- old filmmaker of Egypt) that many analogous ideas sprang up from my mind, making this poem possible.

Dr Dalip Khetarpal is an Author, poet, critic, editor, and reviewer. He has worked as a Lecturer in English at Manchanda Delhi Public College, Delhi. He worked in various capacities, as Lecturer, Senior Lecturer and H .O. D (English) in various academic institutes in Haryana. He was a Dy. Registrar and Joint Director at the Directorate of Technical Education, Haryana, Chandigarh.

Dr Dalip has also started a new genre in the field of poetry, which he would like to call "psycho-psyhic flints".

Farideh Hassanzadeh

pen pal romance

More than kisses, Letters mingle souls
—John Donne

We never met each other.

I never saw you in pyjamas ,
brushing your teeth just before sleep

and I never got a glimpse of your soaking head
out of the shower as you'd yell:
"I forgot my comb, will ya please give it to me?"

I never saw you limbering up
early in the morning;
or at night ,when you are snoring
and water is oozing out
from the corner of your lips...

I never had the fortune
to iron your shirt
or serve you a bowl of hot soup

and cover you up at nights
when you catch a cold.

In the cold of midnights
our bodies never made each other warm;

But imbued with fabulous lies and dreams
our letters and poems
more beautiful and innocent than pure truth
announced us husband and wife
formally.

And our children were the love songs
Immortal in the rains of bombs
Invulnerable, against the curses of Gods .



Farideh Hassanzadeh is an Iranian poet, translator and freelance journalist. Her poems have appeared in the anthologies *Letters to the World*, *Contemporary Women Poets of Iran*, *After Shocks: The Poetry of Recovery for Life-Shattering Events*, (edited by Tom Lombardo), *The Poetry Of Iranian Women* by Sheema Kalbasi, *Tonight, An Anthology of World Love Poetry* by Amitabh Mitra.

She has authored *Eternal Voices: Interviews with Poets East and West* and co-authored *The Last Night with Sylvia Plath: Essays on Poetry*. She has also translated *Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot*, *Federico Garcia Lorca: A Life* by Ian Gibson, *Anthology of Contemporary African Poetry*, *Selected Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva*, *Women Poets of the World*, *Twentieth Century Latin American Poetry*, *Selected Poems of Iaroslav Seifert*, *Pablo Neruda: A Passion for Life*, *Blood of Adonis* by Samuel Hazo, *The Beauty of Friendship: Selected Poems by Khalil Gibran*, *Love Poetry of the World, Classic and Contemporary*, and *Selected Poems by Blaga Dimitrova*. the *Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry*.

Her new book is *Footprints of Cats in Poetry, Stories, Paintings, Politics, Religion, Medicine, Cinema and Science.*"

Feneena S Mohamed

It is just our daughter's marriage

It is just our daughter's marriage-
coming Sunday,
the boy is in the Gulf.

The groom, the father
and the mullah-
they join hands,
and seal the fate.

The mullah's words
on matrimony,
drizzle on chicken fry
washed by mutton curry.

Dark chocolate and milky white
paired with just two
sovereigns of gold-
they flash through cracks of light;
you know
the oil fields have dried up.

The bride enters wide-eyed,
her brocade saree
splashed with hibiscus;
her rolls of jasmine white, visible
under the gaudy golden net;
the scent of her sister's wedding.

She was paraded,
a gleam of gold
bought with mortgaged land-
an elephant decked for *Pooram*.
The hall booked with a relative's money,
even the hall was decorated
with the best of flowers.

The boy is in the Gulf,
So, no problem.
It is just our daughter's marriage.

Feneena S Mohamed works in the Department of English, Union Christian College, Alwaye. The poem is her attempt to convey the horror of the floods that rocked her small town, Aluva, on the banks of the river Periyar. Caught in an ugly political struggle, the old dam of Mullaperiyar raises issues of safety and security.

Glen Sorestad

Erasing History

Is this not where the farm of our youth stood?
Nothing here but canola field, right to the road.

Where are the fences, the gateway to the farm,
the garden, the rhubarb patch, the caragana hedges?

What happened to the barn Grandfather built of logs?
The sheds, the small wood frame house, the aspens

that sheltered us from bitter northwest winds?
Where have they gone? How can a ten-foot deep

farm dug-out disappear, as if it never existed,
as if it watered no cows, raised no ducks or geese?

A single farm, a thousand stories, grown fainter
and fainter until stories and tellers are lost.

A blooming field of canola, a dazzle of yellow
beneath cyan sky, wind to tally gains or losses.

Overnight Snow

To be human is to be curious.

We want to know.

We step from the house,
a morning after overnight snow
and the first animal tracks
bring us up short.

Who does not want to read
messages left in snow
that has created this white world,
a vast page upon which
little dramas have left their traces?

Something primal, atavistic,
clings and lingers within,
a desire to understand,
to seek answers, whether we are
part of the urban majority,
or the few who still live
close to nature. Who or what
made these tracks?

Rabbit? Coyote? Red fox?

We want to know.

If we have lived in the countryside,
even a small portion of our lives,
we still recognize
most of the animal tracks we see.
We see a fresh message that says,
Jack rabbit, going fast.
Must have been spooked.
Look at those strides!

Reading the spoor satisfies
an inherited need,
our ancestors peering intently
over our shoulders at these
early morning snow graphics.

Out on the Pier

The ominous park sign makes us watch the shoreline water
for knobby eyes breaking the surface from the reedy lake,

a lurking shape in the murk below the dock's walkway.
The day is blustery, raw. Surely no self-respecting gator

will be hanging around – even if this is Florida. Winter
is still winter. We are intent on human figures hunched

at the end of the small pier alongside the boat ramp.
Manatee State Park appears otherwise deserted.

A man and his wife are fishing. Are they catching anything
more than the brow-beating gusts, driving them deeper

into their winter hoodies? We bend into the icy breeze,
drawn to the lure of human conversation and warmth.

The World We Live In

A woman goes out to a bar
for a few drinks with friends.
She has a very fine time,
but she never makes it home.
She has become data –
a missing person file.

A teary high school freshie
asks the principal for help
opening his new locker.
The principal stops what he
is doing, goes to unlock
the freshie's locker.

A man kneels on the ground,
hands bound behind him,
moments before a terrorist
sword decapitates him
in the name of some ism.

A fire truck arrives at
an elderly woman's home;
a fireman climbs the ladder

to rescue a frightened kitten
from its lofty tree perch,
returns it to its owner.

Glen Sorestad has been writing and publishing his poetry for a half-century now. His poetry has appeared in literary magazines, journals and reviews in many countries and his poems have now been translated and published in eight languages. He lives in the city of Saskatoon on the western plains of Canada. He is a member of the Order of Canada, Canada's highest non-military honor.

Ronny Noor

The Divine Messenger: Homage to Mohammed Rafi

You lift me to the heavens with your songs,
Wafting a whiff of Heaven with your songs.

I float free as dust *in Creator's glow*.
What can comfort broken hearts but your songs?

You descended breaking out of the clouds:
A farishta to sing to us love songs.

You have kindled love in huts and mansions,
And we have fallen in love with your songs.

Through the curtain of dense smoke we hear you:
The flute and the azaan sing the same songs.

Birth death wedding and divorce – on every
Occasion of our lives we play your songs.

For ages you haven't walked the streets with us.
But our hearts throb with the pulse of your songs.

When your divine voice rings in the dark hours,
The nightingales hush to welcome your songs.

Your mesmeric melody makes me wish
I could live forever wrapped in your songs.

Alas! Time will sweep me into God's arms.
And I will fly with the drift of your songs.

Ghazal

The moment I popped out, claimed my mother,
She almost crossed over, my poor mother.

She held me all the more tight to her breast,
Her first born, so special to my mother.

A pure heart is a firefly in the night.
I learned the first sentence from my mother.

Gracing the dinner plate, roasted lamb chops.
Especially for you, said my mother.

When I asked her what hid under the snow,
Life, was the crisp answer of my mother.

Plato pursued her, as did Sartre – their
Philosophia, my dearest mother.

Seasons have rolled by since her last goodbye.
But sundown reminds me of my mother.

When I was home she'd holler: *The switch, dear.*
And the house would light up, like my mother.



Ronny Noor is an English professor at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, U.S.A. An award-winning teacher, his poems, essays, and stories have appeared in journals and newspapers such as *The Toronto Review*, *South Asian Review*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *Commonwealth*

Novel in English, *Kokako*, *paper wasp*, *FreeXpreSion*, *World Haiku Review*, *The Weekend Independent*, *The Daily Star*, and *Contemporary Literary Review India*.

He is also the author of *Snake Dance in Berlin* (a novel), *Slice of Heaven and Other Essays* (a collection), and *Where Heaven Spreads Wide & Other Stories* (Leaf Press, India).

Shaheed Quadri

An Embarrassing Conversation

Written by: Shaheed Quadri

Translated by: Sarwar Morshed

*You pined for hearing some unwhispered honeyed words
and soon, oblivious of space and time, we were cocooned
into an unusual conversation – We circumnavigated a
series of ethereal realms, ultimately anchoring at an
embarrassing thought-landscape.*

You: My prince, pour some novel sweet-nothing into my ears.

Me: Clusters of darkness, like a pack of black-masked bandits, are trying to hound the rabbit-white, trembling moon.

You: It doesn't make any sense!

Yet another bout of unpronounced disclosure came out murmuringly:

Haven't you heard that a kingfisher is lying dead on the other bank of the river after it was accorded a fatal reception by a trinity of fishes?

Your eye-balls with their quick gyrations told it all:

It's against the natural law and hence implausible.

A bit loudly, I continued the soft-soaping:

Honey, believe me,

The wilderness with all its intractability

Is encroaching our beloved cities.

With a depressive smile, you argued:

The fact is just the reverse -

The killer hands of men have strangled the floral season of the land.

This encounter transformed my infatuation into mild fury:

Do you have any idea about what has happened to our rivers?

Rejected by the sea, as if tsunami-driven, they are coming back to our villages and cities like the

irresistible waves of Tartar bandits!

Disdainfully, you responded:

None should pollute their auditory organs with these ominous words.

Me at the tether, threw the ultimate bait:

Look! There the top-predators, the majestic tigers

are running helter-skelter for refuge being chased by the fawns!

With a melancholy-inducing smile, you:

Will the world be ever blessed by the celestial landing of this brand of golden days?

About the Poet

Shaheed Quaderi is one of the prominent poets of post-1947 Bangla poetry, who brought a new angle to the Bangladeshi literary scene by introducing urbanism and a sense of modernity. His poetry is infused with patriotism, cosmopolitanism and universalism.

His notable poems include "Uttoradhikar", "Tomake Obhibadon Priyotoma", "Kothao Kono Krondon Nei" and "Amar Chumbongulo Poucchey Dao".

Quaderi received the Ekushey Padak, the highest national award of Bangladesh, in the category of Language and Literature in 2011. He was earlier awarded the Bangla Academy Award in 1973. Quaderi died at the age of 74 in the US in 2016.

About the Translator



Sarwar Morshed has been working as an Associate Professor at the Department of English, Chittagong University, Bangladesh. Mr. Morshed, a Ph.D. scholar, has to his credit a second masters on ELT from the UK. Apart from research and academic writing, he is also interested in creative writing. His works both in English and the vernacular include *Depoeticized Rhapsody, In the Castle of My Mind* (Reviewed in *Asiatic*), *Figuratively Speaking*, *Rendezvous with Words* and *Husam Uddiner Election Khela* (A collection of belles lettres penned in Bangla).

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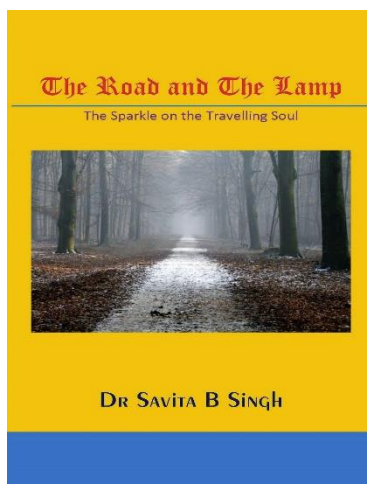


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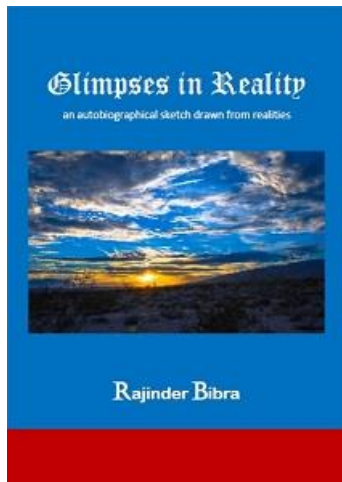
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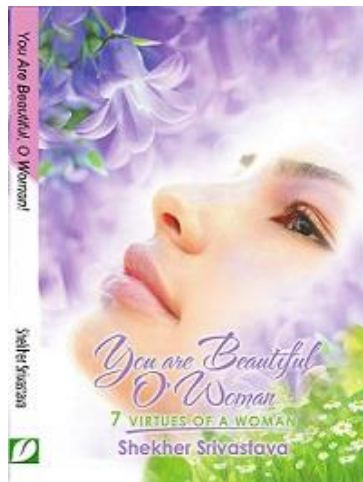
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You Are Beautiful, O Woman!

Shekher Srivastava

*You are Beautiful
O Woman*
7 VIRTUES OF A WOMAN
Shekher Srivastava

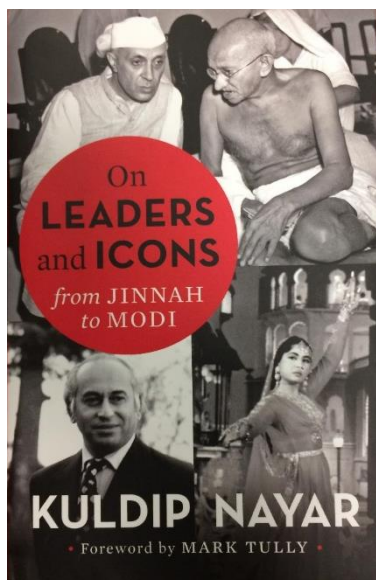
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Book Reviews

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Book Review on Kuldip Nayar's *On Leaders and Icons*

Debasish Bhattacharyya



Legendary journalist Kuldip Nayar finished his book *On Leaders and Icons from Jinnah to Modi* barely a few weeks before he passed away last year. In his riveting last book, Nayar recounts his experiences of meeting and working with several leaders and icons shaping the destiny of pre- and post-Independence India; also recovers the truths and explodes the myths surrounding them.

After migrating from Sialkot, Pakistan to Delhi, Kuldip Nayar was keen to see Mahatma Gandhi. So, he went to Birla House, venue for Gandhi's daily afternoon prayers where passages from all the holy books, the Gita, the Bible and the Quran were read. According to author, one day a Punjabi Hindu objected to the reading of Quran because he had reservation about the religion. It resulted in Gandhiji adjourning the regular prayer session for a week till such time he agreed to withdraw his earlier position of opposing Quran recitation.

Another Punjabi Hindu migratory from Pakistan threw a long knife at Gandhiji's feet because his only son was killed by Muslims. In response to this, Gandhiji advised him to raise a 12-year Muslim orphan in the best Islam tradition to shame the bigoted.

It's therefore no wonder why even decades after his assassination, Mahatma Gandhi still has a powerful message for the world.

Perhaps it's only Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a Congress Working Committee member, in Indian political history, who despite being offered presidency preferred to remain an ordinary party worker. Khan, popularly known as Badshah Khan as also Frontier Gandhi was close to Gandhiji and a staunch supporter of his non-violence.

Founder of Khudai Khidmatgar (servants of God) movement, Badshah Khan strongly opposed All-India Muslim League's demand for partition of India only to see Indian National Congress later agreeing to partition plan without even consulting movement leaders. To this, he told Congress "You have thrown us to the wolves".

After independence, Badshah Khan demanded autonomy for Pashtunistan as an independent state within Pakistan which remained his life long battle. Nayar felt Khan was so popular in India that he could have easily become President either before or after Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

During his meeting with Khan, the author observed that Frontier Gandhi was never forgiving to Nehru as he failed to keep his promise that following India's freedom, Pashtunistan would too become an independent country.

The human rights activist, Nayar always remembered Lal Bahadur Shastri for his austere living and frugal needs. While serving as Shastriji's information officer, the then

home minister, Shastriji confided in Nayar that had the Pakistani troops fought by the side of Indian soldiers and driven out the Dragon during the Indo-China war in 1962, it would have been difficult to say 'no' if Pakistan had asked for Kashmir.

In his spellbinding book, Nayar wrote he first met Mohammed Ali Jinnah when he was in Law College in Lahore. Jinnah, who initially joined Indian National Congress in 1906 avoiding Indian Muslim league, joined latter in 1913 following his rift with Gandhiji.

Jinnah however passed away in 1948, a year after the Pakistan's creation and Gandhiji died a few months earlier. The exemplary diplomat, Nayar felt had both of them lived longer and led their countries for some more time, Indo-Pak relations might have been better.

According to the author, Jawaharlal Nehru truly wanted Indira Gandhi to succeed him which he might have denied publicly and he was of the view Nehru's thinking was on the lines of Mughal kings.

Following Nayar's exclusive report in UNI that immediately after Nehru's death Morarji was the first one to throw his hat in the ring created widespread outrage which destroyed Morarji's chance to succeed as next prime minister.

'Indira, you were beautiful before and now you look even more beautiful' was Nayar's response to Indira Gandhi's question how she looked following her hair shortening.

Regarding Mrs Gandhi's death, Nayar mentioned that post-Golden Temple Operation she was warned by Intelligence Bureau that two of her bodyguards be replaced, but Mrs Gandhi said "I have full faith in him" and eventually they were the killers.

When Nayar met Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the then prime minister of Pakistan and asked him whether the 1965 war was his doing, he didn't deny and also assured that he would never repeat what he had done and he had 'learnt from history'.

Nayar met Sheikh Mujibar Rahman several times and during one of the interviews he asked Mujib about anti-India feeling which he encountered while visiting Dhaka Press Club. To this, Mujib said those press men were pro-Pakistanis who used to enjoy regular stipend from Rawalpindi.

At a function in Aligarh Muslim University, Nayar found Farooq Abdullah, the speaker, fundamentalist in approach which he complained to his father Sheikh Abdulah who was opposed to violence. Nayar wrote that Sheikh Abdulah was conscious of the fact that 'the state had more guns than an individual or a political party could muster and it would be foolhardy to confront the government with weapons'.

Jayaprakash Narayan's movement was for cleansing and as Nayar wrote that though it was against Mrs. Gandhi's autocratic and corrupt rule, JP raised the larger question of propriety and morality in public life.

It was however a different story when Lalu Prasad who owed his political career to the JP Movement was power hungry, an antithesis of what JP stood for.

Khushwant Singh, a renowned journalist also bar-at-law from London, called as Professor Sahib by Nayar, taught him company law. Singh's weekly column 'With Mallice Towards One and All' was critical of militants of Punjab. However, during the anti-Sikh riots in 1984 he had to seek shelter in the Swiss embassy in Delhi to save himself from the wrath of Hindu extremists who were killing Sikhs with the connivance of police, Nayar wrote.

Nayar met Faiz Ahmad Faiz in Kremlin, Moscow after Inder Malhotra, eminent journalist introduced him to other visiting Indian journalists as the greatest living poet. Leftist in ideology, Faiz was frugal in personal habits and living and didn't believe in any religion. And, as he lived in Pakistan, he described Islam as Lal Islam or Red Islam.

The accounts written about JRD Tata, B P Koirala, Meena Kumari and Noor Jehan, A B Vajpayee, Mamohan Singh are no less enchanting. However, the only leader Nayar didn't meet in person was Narandra Modi, but his concluding two lines about Modi appears significant which reads 'At this juncture Modi would need his party the most. But how could that be possible when he himself has become BJP?'

In closing, let me say this: celebrated journalist and author Kuldeep Nayar's last book exquisitely demonstrates his distinctive ability to question the need for fiction when real life is so plump with drama and intrigue. Personal anecdotes about a number of leaders and icons makes this book a rare treat for readers of modern Indian affairs.

Title: On Leaders and Icons

Author: Kuldeep Nayar

Publisher: Speaking Tiger Publishing Pvt. Ltd.

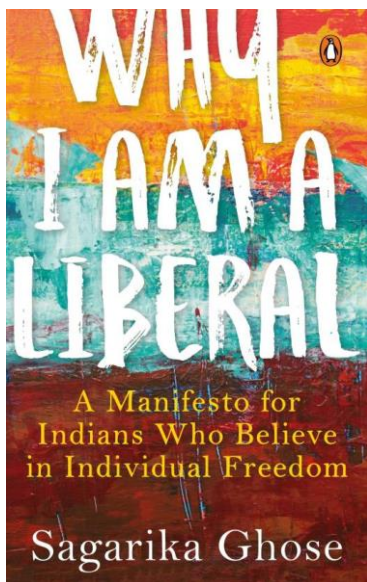
Available: [Amazon](#)

Debasish Bhattacharyya is a former General Manager, International Centre, Goa, And Deputy General Manager, India International Centre, New Delhi.

Book Review on Sagarika Ghose's *Why I am Liberal*

Satinderpal Singh Bawa

A senior journalist and columnist Sagarika Ghose's 'Why I am Liberal' is related with individual freedom. She focuses on the contemporary social, political and economic issues in India, especially those which are imposed on individual freedoms by the Big Government(s). The democratic values; liberty, equality and justice have been continually trembling because the Big Governments are imposing the number of new norms in the name of so-called 'nationalism' which leads to destabilise and damage the social fabric of India.



When Ghose defines the basic term 'liberal' she comprehends all the contextual references in history, even she understands the limitations of the term then why she is using this term as main theme of the book? Because she thinks that word 'liberal' is central to all social, economic and political debates at this moment. She believes that 'the Hindutva nationalist government born in 2014 has shattered the fragile yet prevailing liberal consensus that had existed

since 1947.’ So in the present political and social scenario the importance of progressive and liberal thinking is more significant as compare to the period of the twentieth century because people are being divided in the name of religions, casts and creeds. ‘Creating political divides is the essence of extremist ideology’, which is very hazardous for the healthy democratic essence. She claims that M.K. Gandhi was not just the father of nation he was also the father of Indian liberalism because he did not believe in enforcing his personal ideology through government agencies; and Jawaharlal Nehru was a ‘social liberal’ and B.R. Amedkar was a ‘quintessential liberal’ respectively. So her liberalism is multi-dimensional.

Sagarika Ghose has been working as a journalist from the last three decades, so she understands how the governments and corporate bosses control the media in India that is why she realises that ‘institutionally, India’s press is dreadfully and shockingly weak’ because ‘muscular nationalism’ has set new norms in the contemporary journalism. She considers that anti-national is the blanket term to delegitimize and marginalise all those who raise questions in the ‘Modi-era zeitgeist. Even intellectuals are divided in two major categories ‘nationalists’ and ‘urban Naxals’.

All though India is known to believe in diversity because Indian political and social system is much liberal. But new-India has changed this definition now if anyone wants to live in India he or she has to prove his/her nationalism by sporting all the ‘bans’ imposed otherwise he or she would be categorized as ‘anti-national’. That is why Sagarika Ghose is claiming that individual freedom is important because the people of the world’s largest democratic country cannot be bound to certain believes of the any ruling party. She strongly criticises scaremonger in the name of nationalism because she trusts in civilisation which

is 'the idea of India'. She takes number of examples from history, politics and mythology to prove the cultural diversification in India. 'Indian patriotism is not about making enemies of other human beings, it's about making enemies of injustice, oppression and prejudice.' she notes. It is shocking that the most of the prominent scholars, writers and reporters had been attacked, even killed and some got threatening letters/emails every day they feel insecure their life because the far right groups are so active in the Big governments.

When the orthodox Hindus imposes prohibition of meat or any non-vegetarian food with the help of mob or the Big State at that time they degrade and damage the true spirit of a religion which endorse the sectionalism and sectarianism. Ghose says that the religious extremism in any form is an extension of politicization and leads to degeneration and deterioration of a religion. She finds that the Hindutva has some injudicious elements which have nothing to do with the true Hindu traditions, the political Hindu are politicizing Hinduism merely. This thesis is proved with applicable quotes form The Bhagavad Gita where she authentically differentiates the true Hindu and a political Hindu; at the end of this discourse she concludes that 'Hinduism sits easily with liberalism because of its rejection of authoritarian power.' So she is very clear about the true spirit of a religion and its importance in our life; she quotes some significant incidents form the holy books to prove something in the context of liberalism and cultural diversities in India.

India has the second largest Muslim population in the world but what an ironic that they feel 'not safe' in their own country because some political 'agents' and their accomplices are constantly asking their loyalty and

commitment to the 'nation' which is hazardous for Indian democracy.

She says that the decision of demonetization was an act of 'rampaging' Big State power, because at the movement the government had a not only 'temporal power' only but she had a certain 'sacred power' that is way the decision of demonetization was apotheosised as a purification rituals. She believes that coalition governments have tended more liberal, consensual and respectful than governments with massive mandates because the massive mandates may lead to centralise the policies, endorse the 'ban culture', stamp out individual freedom and break all the institutional checks on the power of the Big State.

She acclaims the work of Narendra Dabholker, Govind Pansare and Gauri Lankesh who made conscious efforts to resist Hindutva majoritarianism or 'safferon terror'. Gose has a faith in liberal ideology; she has a firm determination that 'the pen is the foremost enemy of the sword because the sword does not have a solid case against the pen.' But what a satirical that every government tries to control the power of the pen, even in 'secular congress' she finds some culpabilities, 'It was secular congress who in Indira Gandhi's time imprisoned 253 journalists and Rajiv Gandhi, who tried to bring in Anti-Defamation Bill.' So her retrospective analysis of historical events is much balanced. 'The true journalist is a patriot when she tells the truth, a blind 'nationalist' when she falsifies it for political ends', she writes. She genuinely believes that it is the duty of a journalist to reveal the truth. Gose finds historic recurrences in the two major political parties in the BJP and the Congress like: 'A Congress government once created a terror-spreading Jarnil Singh Bindranwale in Punjab in the 1980s; today's BJP-led government rarely condemns terror-spreading cattle protectors or gau rakshaks.' So she

demands a genuine accountability from the Big State that a state should act against perpetrators of such type of terror and violence.

Gose rejects reservation for women in politics because liberal must discard the quota mentality and the group identity mentality because that type of reservation undermines individuality for the sake of narrowly defined collective.

We always live in a current and contemporary history because in our times a history writes itself. This book reshapes some liberal thoughts a manifesto for Indians who believe in individual freedom in the context of contemporary history. Though, this book does not give us a certain answer of the contemporary political, economic, and social issues rather than it is a question bank which defines the accountability of the Big State as well as the accountability of the individual one. This book consciously makes an effort to save the ideology of liberalism in India and spirit of federal multiculturalism. If one understands the true spirit of liberalism in India he or she must read this 'polemical book'.

Title: Why I am Liberal

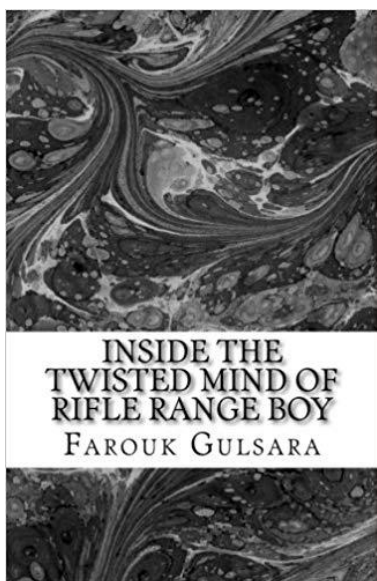
Author: Sagarika Ghose

Publisher: Penguin Viking

Available: [Flipkart](#)

Book Review on Farouk Gulsara's ***Inside the Twisted Mind of Rifle*** ***Range Boy***

Prof Shiv Sethi



‘Inside the Twisted Mind of Rifle Range Boy’ is a meleanage of profound thoughts penned down by Farouk Gulsara. Hailing from a family where everybody perceives that there is only a single way to deal with the things either black or white whereas the writer is inclined to have an altogether contrary viewpoint . As he advances in the years and grows mature , he becomes aware of the harsh reality that the family of his parents has innumerable blood curdling tales to narrate because they had witnessed the seamy side of life during the turbulent times of early Malaya.

Farouk Gulsara makes the most of that opportunity and begins to write his own blog known as ‘Rifle Range Boy’. There is no denying the fact that we the people very conveniently bend rules and regulations to cater to our own whims and fancies. Brahmins are normally considered as the propagators of vegetarianism, but the Brahmins

dwelling around the Bay of Bengal and Kashmir have not set such prohibitions for them and they place fish on their platter as their staple diet. Thus, Man is basically a bundle of contradictions. The writer renders twelve years of his services as a Government employee. But he is badly disillusioned and thinks of himself as an idiot for his unwavering commitment to work when he observes that others are being paid lucratively without toiling hard. The varied cultures, diverse civilizations and religion have dovetailed with one another and everything has become a religious event. Indian mythology and festivals have been cherished with unshakable faith, but no one is keen to give heed to the similarities among these different fiestas.

The author appears to be deeply agitated at heart when people question him over his ethnicity or look upon him as an Indian Malaysian. His parents belonged to Malaysia and so does he. Though he has never even set a foot on the Indian soil and evidently specifies in the book that he has no intention to visit India. For he is least interested in beholding the spectacle of poverty ridden people for that he need not pay visit to India. He can have that repulsive glimpse in his own backyard. And a big No to temples, as God is omnipresent for him. Farouk Gulsara has his distinctive views about Hinduism, India, and Bollywood. He holds Late Shammi Kapoor in derision by equating him with a fat monkey, but makes frequent usage of Manoj Kumar's dialogues for reference in another anecdote. He sheds light on the various cuisines of India, but he has no desire to try Indian food because the menu of Malaysia comprises a vast variety of umpteen delicacies and he is fully content with his life in his native land and its foods. The author poses to be a sentimental fool whereas a discerning reader will take this with a pinch of salt.

The downside with the book is that at some places it is marred with prolixity, superfluousness and repetition and one of chapters has been translated into French which is beyond the ken of most of the readers. Undoubtedly, we aspire for perfection in life contrary to that our life has many imperfection and some of which we can never do away with. We whine, we cringe, we fret and fume, we grumble, we demand and we assert our rights but eventually the reality dawns upon us and we come to terms with the fact that we are mere pawns in the hands of the mighty forces of destiny. Here I am aptly reminded of a famed Victorian writer Thomas Hardy who gives much credence to the philosophy of Determinism and Fatalism.

The writer of this book also throws a flood of light on the legal system of Malaysia and its economic state of affairs. Here we come across several stark similarities between India and Malaysia. In both the nations in the name of development poor people have to bear the brunt of displacement and are bound to lead nomadic existence. The education system is in a shambles and they still require interpreters just like their ancestors required some five decades ago. The so-called modern day parents are shown dancing to the tune of the snake charmers' flute blinded with abominable superstitions. They are unbothered for the dreams and aspirations of their children and in a way suffer from Peter complex.

To lend a concrete shape to one's pent-up thoughts has not been very popular practice in literature with no specific genre. But soon the writer listens to his inner voice and gets convinced that many roads do indeed lead to Rome, and there is a divine power up there righting the wrong, but still, we have a host of instances of misdeeds committed by the Church and a long lost legacy of the renowned figures. We as humans are capable of inspiring a person to an

extent only. Beyond that it is entirely up to his genes or nature whether he succeeds in reaching his place in space on time or not. If a person fails to measure up to certain expectations, it does not signify that he is a failure. We all have to be stretched in order to grow.

In our pursuit to growth and edification rigorous discipline is of paramount importance. Which caste one belongs to does not matter at all. As the author alludes that Hindus would resort to hard penance either through self-imposed starvation, self-flagellation, self-piercing, and observe countless other rituals and customs before Mahatma Gandhi proposed Satyagraha. It is all deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche. The author narrates different stories of the people who arrive in his life and to whom he is all available to lend a helping hand and offer his shoulder to cry on and achieve their Aristotelian cathartic bliss.

The writer is exasperated with the fact that the little cherubic children will be unable to fully bloom into the majestic swan that they always hanker to be. The Asian attitude to life believes in producing a generation of studious book worms only. Nobody bothers if the children have earned enough of life experiences and optimal professional qualifications coupled with the sufficient emotional maturity to match with. Once the formal degrees and material comforts begin to rolling , people here get a semblance of contentment and start believing that now everything will fall in place. Alack! the modern folk dwell in an illusion or a shambolic world . Much to the writer's chagrin, they are heading towards a cultural bankruptcy as they have lost their connect with their moorings.

With great power comes great responsibility. Information is the power and the unquenchable thirst of mankind for knowledge seems insatiable. Some theories are accepted as pure Gospel; while others are debatable. The Government

lies to people in the name of National Security, and it creates more curiosity and restrictions to self-expression. In our daily lives too, we see many able bodies leading miserable life.

The world is fraught with hatred and fissiparous tendencies around us. Even amongst apparently homogeneous societies, there is suspicion and desire to dominate over the other. There is West, East, North, and South, Hindus, Christian, and Muslims, the fair skinned and the dark-skinned, indigenous people and immigrants, moderates and conservatives, all exist with their dichotomous ideologies. The list goes on. But still, people flock together and put their resources during the disasters like earthquakes and tsunami. It reflects the humanity is not fully dead yet.

Farouk Gulsara makes use of the allusions of Arnold Schwarzenegger to Steve Jobs and Lord Shiva. Though he does not provide any solutions about the different worldly problem, but only offers his opinions, and twisted thoughts of his deviant mind. Therefore, this work emerges as a refreshing and eye-opening read. The language is lucid. The narration is flawless. The author also takes recourse to Hindi and Malay languages at many places in the book. . His spontaneous thoughts spread all over the canvas of the book. There's no dull moment and It is an unputdownable work.

Title: Inside the Twisted Mind of Rifle Range Boy

Author: Farouk Gulsara

Publisher: Inside The Twisted Mind of Rifle Range Boy

Available: [Amazon](#)

About the Reviewer



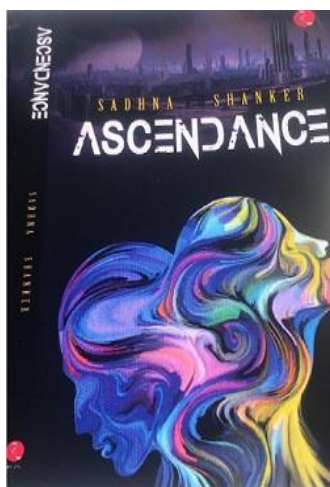
Prof. Shiv Sethi (Ph D, M Phil, four times MA) is the Head of the Department of English language and Linguistics at Dev Samaj Post Graduate College For Women Ferozepur for the last 17 years.

His research articles have been published in various journals of international repute including The Tribune, The Hindu, The Hindustan Times, The New Indian Express, The Deccan Herald, The Hitavada, and The Daily post and in several newspapers of neighboring countries like Nepal and Pakistan. He has presented his papers at various universities in India and abroad. He is a guide for research scholars for M Phil thesis.

Book Review on Sadhna Shanker's *Ascendance*

Prof Shiv Sethi

Set far away from the present day conundrum -stricken life on earth, “Ascendance” by Sadhna Shanker endeavours to explore the idea of new social constructs and tries to imagine life in remote future. The author categorises the book as a literary science fiction which is a little dystopian in temperament. Unlike conventional science books, “Ascendance” does not portray the conflict of human beings with aliens and machines. The book skilfully depicts the eventual change brought in by science in the lives of men and women with a tinge of philosophy. It lays more emphasis on the philosophical assessment rather than the enthralling occurrences. The whodunit factor of the book entices a mystery loving brain and calls for more attention towards its subject, where you are tempted to compare the world delineated in the novel to our Earth.



The story is set in the twenty third century on an alienated planet called “Elone” which can also be dubbed as ‘Alone’ as we gradually begin to understand the word play. The planet is inhabited by antagonistic species. There is a boundary on the planet which is called “fence” that

separates these inhabitants from one another . The author consciously represents both men and women independent of their needs. There are no strings attached and the otherwise natural reproductive link has been brought to an end. Much to the astonishment of the readers, each of the species can clone their offspring. However, one can not make a sweeping statement that the book is gender biased as it might apparently suggest. In fact, it diligently attempts to explore the possibility of cloning and a change in gender roles that may take place in the times to come.

The book starts with a death mystery of Seeni, one of the inhabitants of “Elone”. She is assumed to have been ‘taken’ (dead). Since the other part of the planet is inhabited by other species called men, Seeni’s disappearance raises a lot of doubts among the people of her own clan. She is believed to have been killed by the people on the other side of the ‘fence’. The actual cause of the death is investigated by a council of women. The entire story revolves around the murder mystery of Seeni and each layer of secrets pertaining to Seeni’s death is peeled off in a gradual but meticulous manner. We are introduced to a brigade of characters like Maya, Tioni, Tara, Iwe, Promly, Ultur, Seeni, Radul, Phatix, Blum, Odex, Durk and so on. Even the terminology used for days and time on Elone is quite peculiar and distinctive in its own way. For instance, we are introduced with the terms Nex, Lex, Vihan, Zacs etc. Though the use of difficult to remember names and a rush of characters does not impress the readers much and at times makes them somewhat uncomfortable too but it all fits quite well into the scheme of a science fiction. However, this may be because of the choice of the theme and the setting of the book that makes it feasible for the author to take recourse to such uncanniness. A serious reader will spontaneously but slowly be able to connect the dots and assimilate all the relationships in their profundity.

Imagination is the epicentre of this science fiction and the writer seems to be blessed with the faculty of rich and ficund imagination. She picks a planet beyond the planet earth. Life on Elone is quite in contrast and contradiction in the life we experience on this earth. The denizens of this planet are two species: men and women. They look upon each other as enemies. Elone is the brain child of Sadhna Shanker and she successfully and skilfully establishes a link with earth through the character of Maya. The music that Seeni used to listen and relish is the music that belongs to Maya who recounts the history of their people. People of Elone do not die unless they are killed which makes them almost immortal and imperishable. They can also replace their organs with the help of “Nepo”. Women are much advanced in technology and they have found an alternative called “Amar”, as the level of the mineral is waning. Men on the other hand have not been able to find any substitute for” Nepo”. Thus, they hatch a conspiracy to attack women in order to obtain the absolute control on the planet. Both men and women are oblivious of their origin and therefore have no idea of their actual lineage.

The author gets full marks for weaving a strong and gripping plot. She dexterously narrates the story with the efficiency of a master raconteur. Every scene has been craftily designed beyond the boundaries of the chapters. The author elaborates every episode with minute details. For example, “in the window, the first rays of sunlight made an appearance. Maya’s music continued to play as dawn broke in a world that did not recognize it, but was still enthralled by it.” Besides, the author stunningly and scintillatingly succeeds in maintaining the suspense at every step of the story. Sadhna’s thought process is incredible that helps her achieve a tight tone in the novel in which the Ideas are born from the union of reason, observation, imagination and quest. The basis of these

ingredients may change, but as these concepts are never-ending, the ideas also remain intact . She marvellously juggles with the words and thus has got full control over her language and how she delves deeper and deeper into the innermost recesses of her characters reflects her skill and knack of characterisation. She resorts to intelligible language but the aesthetic sense of the book is not compromised at any juncture. She has used names and terms that would probably be used in future. She also provides glossary at the end of the book in order to help her readers understand the terminology employed in the novel and to make them feel at ease while journeying through its narrative. The fresh and original storyline catches the fancy of its readers. The mystery of Seeni's death is revealed at the end of the novel. Much to the amazement of the readers, she is actually murdered by her own people only. The readers though gather an impression that her death was not necessary and thus could have been warded off. The author leaves no stone unturned to keep the flames of the interest of her readers smouldering throughout the entire book . The novel is the most pertinent commentary on the position of the women in the present society. She also does justice with the genre throughout the book. The terms like science and technology are spread all over the pages of the book. She is definitely at her best capturing the whole spirit of a real science fiction in the this novel which is replete with believable bizarreness.

Title: Ascendance

Author: Sadhna Shanker

Publisher: Rupa Publications

Available: [Amazon](#).

About the Author



Sadhna Shanker is an Indian author, blogger and civil servant. *Ascendance* is her fifth book and second fiction work after “Never a Disconnect’ in 2010. She has written for the International Herald Tribune, Christian Science Monitor, Times of India, Hindustan Times, The Hindu, Indian Express, Huffington Post and The Wire. A PhD in Economics, she is a passionate wordsmith and has an avid interest in books, movies and theatre. She lives in New Delhi and is in the Indian Revenue Service.

About the Reviewer

Prof. Shiv Sethi (Ph D, M Phil, four times MA) is the Head of the Department of English language and Linguistics at Dev Samaj Post Graduate College For Women Ferozepur for the last 17 years.

For more information, see [here](#).

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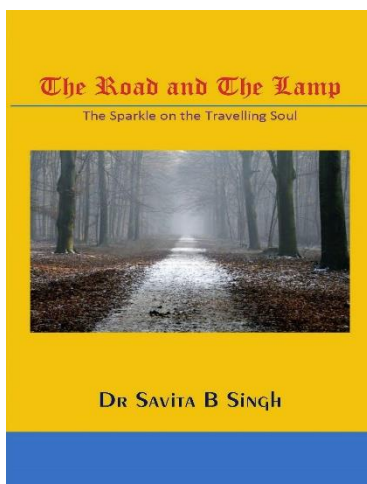


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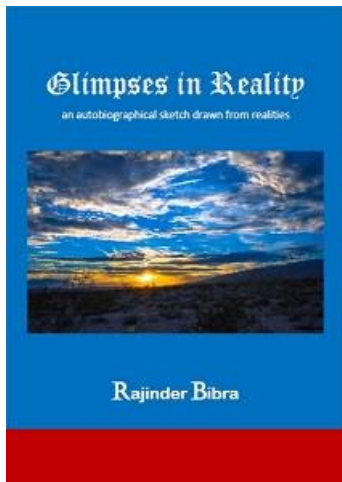
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